THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. MAGAZINE

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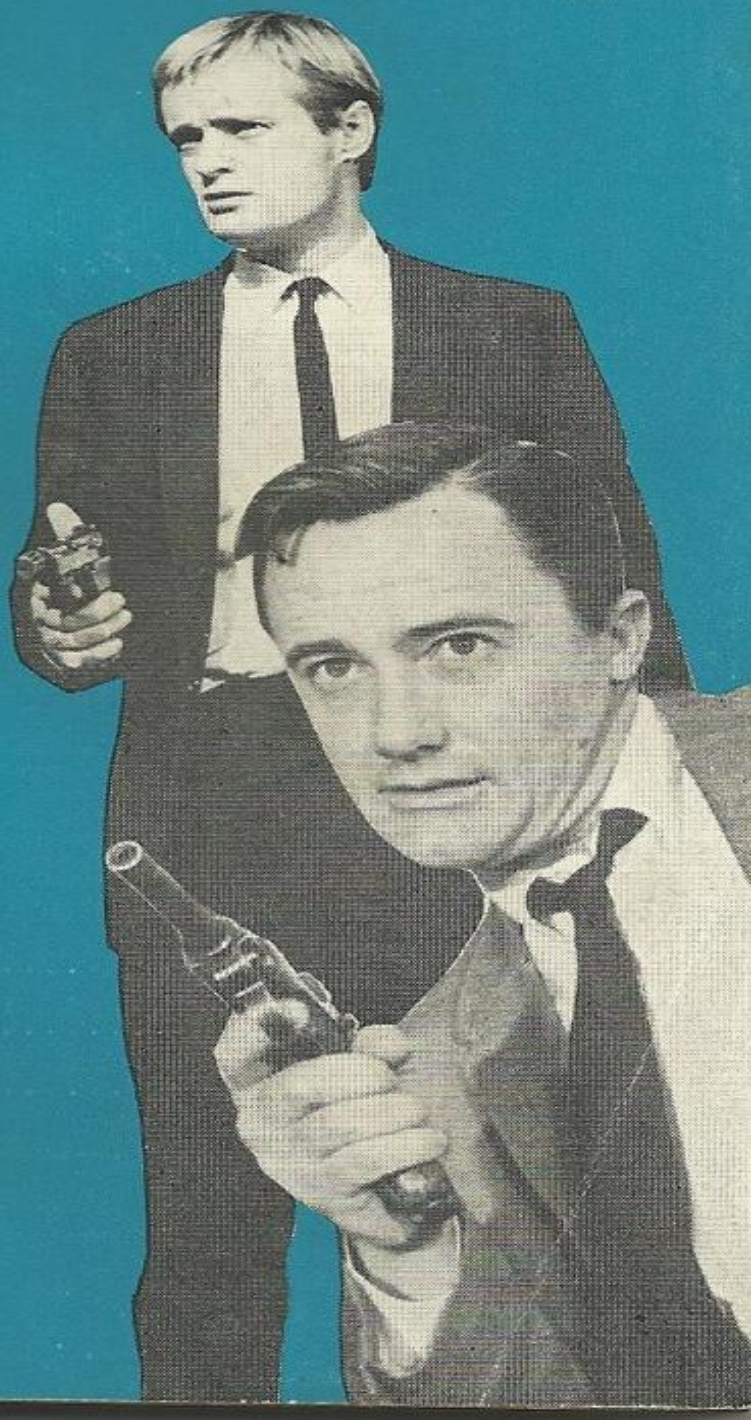
NAPOLEON SOLO
ILLYA KURYAKIN

Fight Against Time and THRUSH in

THE MILLION MONSTER AFFAIR

Looting, pillaging, they ravaged and maimed and killed—the mindless monsters who only yesterday had been happy children!

A Dynamic New U.N.C.L.E. Novel by
ROBERT HART DAVIS



THE INFORMATION SEEKERS

A New Novelet Introducing a New Kind of Detective

by FREDERICK C. DYER

THE MILLION MONSTERS AFFAIR

By ROBERT HART DAVIS

Mindless, without souls and without pity, they looted and killed, as Solo and Illya fought against time and THRUSH to find the dread weapon which transformed happy children into ravening monsters.

ACT I

THE WARNING

Napoleon Solo– whistled softly. His companion, Illya Kuryakin, turned to see what interested his friend.

He saw a girl. And from her becomingly tousled blonde hair down along curves designed for a bikini to splendidly lithe legs, she was a marvel to behold.

Kuryakin's Slavic features lightened up. He echoed Napoleon Solo's soft whistle.

"Now that is the kind of girl who could change my woman-hating ways!" he said.

"I'm not a woman-hater," Solo said with a grin, "But if I were, she would change my mind."

"I guess you know it is impolite to stare," Illya said.

"I know," Solo replied, "but when the girl is that pretty it is stupid not to! It will be a long, long time before we see something as lovely as that."

The girl turned toward them. Napoleon looked hastily away, but when the blonde leaned back in her seat and closed her eyes, he stared at her again. He wasn't being rude. There was something about her that puzzled him.

The first time he looked at her he thought she was deathly afraid. The second time he thought she didn't have a care in the world. Now, as she leaned back in the lobby chair in the Los Angeles International Airport waiting room of East-West Airlines, she seemed to take on a sudden pallor that made her look like a lovely corpse. Solo bent his head over close to his companion.

"She looks familiar," he said in a low voice. "Do you have any idea who she is?"

"She doesn't look familiar to me," Illya said.

"There's something odd about her," Napoleon insisted. "I can't place it, Illya, but it bugs me."

"It is not the odd things about her that is bugging you, friend. I–"

Kuryakin broke off, startled by an abrupt change in the girl's face. Her pale skin suddenly flushed. Her Madonna-like beauty receded. Her eyes snapped open and there was pure hell in them. Her face contorted in a mask that was viciously beautiful, but deadly as a murderous. Her lovely lips snarled back, exposing teeth that gleamed like a young Dracula.

Before the two startled men from U.N.C.L.E. could move, she jerked a tiny gun from her purse. She jumped up. Her face was now completely maniacal.

Both Kuryakin and Solo leaped for her as she insanely pointed the gun toward a group crowded around the ticket counter. Solo, who was a fraction of a second quicker, caught her arm just as she pulled the trigger.

The bullet flashed over the heads of the startled passengers. It struck the wall, glanced and smashed a huge plate glass window looking out on the mall.

She jerked back, pulling free of Solo's grasp. She leveled the gun in his face. He lunged at her, but his knee hit the arm of the chair she had quitted.

Solo sprawled flat. The girl jumped back, leveling the gun at him again.

Kuryakin tried to grab her. She dodged, but the movement spoiled her aim. Her bullet slammed into the floor, inches from Napoleon Solo's head.

Napoleon didn't try to get up. He jerked his body around, throwing himself at her legs. He caught her and pulled her down. It was like throwing his arms about a tornado. She twisted violently. Her knee rammed up in his stomach. He doubled up in pain, but managed to keep his grip on her wrist.

Her strength was superhuman, astounding in one of her slender build. Solo could never have held her had not Kuryakin sprang to his assistance.

Together they forced her back in the seat, but even then they almost couldn't hold her.

Two uniformed policemen came running across the lobby. With their help, she was brought under restraint. Solo touched a hidden catch on the side of his massive black star sapphire ring. A tiny needle protruded. He forced it into the girl's arm.

She shuddered and closed her eyes but her face was still a contorted demon's mask.

But still she kept struggling. Solo looked at her in amazement. Her eyes were closed. Her mouth was half parted. She was breathing deeply, like one asleep.

Kuryakin noted her strange reaction to the knockout drug in the U.N.C.L.E. ring.

“She’s asleep!” he gasped, his own breath short from the exertion of trying to hold her down. “She’s asleep, but why is she still fighting us like mad?”

One of the policemen got his handcuffs about the girl’s ankles. Then they forced the struggling sleeper’s arms behind her back and put the other policeman’s bracelets on her.

She still tried to break away. It took both police to hold her after Kuryakin and Solo stepped back.

Kuryakin touched his own U.N.C.L.E. ring.

“Shall I give her another jolt?” he asked Solo.

Solo shook his head. A slight frown creased his handsome face.

“If that last didn’t put her out, nothing short of death will,” he said slowly. “There is something very strange going on here, Illya.”

The two police were kept busy controlling the girl’s wild motions despite the two sets of handcuffs on her ankles and wrists. This went on until the arrival of a police car. Even after the berserk girl was crushed into a straight jacket, she continued to struggle.

“That sort of strength just isn’t human,” Illya observed. “She should have exhausted herself a long time ago.”

Solo frowned.

“I keep thinking I know her,” he said.

He turned to one of the policemen, who had stepped back, breathing hard, after helping force the crazed girl into the police car.

“Who is she?” Solo asked curiously.

The policeman was one who arrived in the car. He had not seen Illya’s and Napoleon’s participation in preventing the girl from committing murder. He gave Napoleon a suspicious look.

“Who–” he began.

His companion broke in. “Durham, this is Napoleon Solo, from U.N.C.L.E. I worked on a case with him last year.”

“And this is my partner, Illya Kuryakin,” Napoleon said. “He is also a member of the United Command for Law and Enforcement.”

“Is Marsha involved in a case you’re working on?” the policeman asked.

“Marsha? Is that her name?” Solo asked.

“Yeah, Marsha Mallon. She’s the daughter of Fred B. Mallon, the movie producer.”

“That explains why she looked so familiar,” Kuryakin said. “Her mother was the famous star, Roberta Romaine.”

“Is this something she does all the time?” Napoleon asked.

Durham shook his head. “She always had a reputation of being a quiet person. She shunned the usual Hollywood hippie crowd and was supposed to be something of an intellectual.”

“According to one of the columnists,” his companion said, “she was trying to make a career for herself as a research scientist.”

“I wonder–” Napoleon began, but Illya interrupted him.

“Come on, Napoleon. They’re calling our plane.”

“We’ve got an urgent appointment in New York,” Solo told the policeman. “But if you need our testimony in any way, we can arrange to come back later.”

“I don’t think this will ever come to trial,” Durham said. “It’s the first trouble she has been in. And her father has the money to hire that big time Hollywood lawyer all the stars get.”

After bidding good-by to the police crew, Illya and Napoleon hurried to board their plane. As they took their seats, Kuryakin said thoughtfully, “I’d like very much to know what kept that girl fighting like crazy after she obviously was put to sleep by your knockout drops.”

Napoleon nodded soberly. “Did you get the impression that her own mind wasn’t directing her body?”

“Yes,” Kuryakin said positively. “It was almost as if some evil spirit had moved into her subconscious body and was animating it.”

“That, of course, is impossible,” Solo said. “Everything has a natural explanation, but I’ll admit that it did look that way.”

“She was really a beautiful girl,” Illya said. “I feel guilty about running off without trying to help her. But when Mr. Waverly calls, damsels in distress must shift for themselves.”

“Somehow, Illya, I have a hunch that we have not seen the last of that girl,” Napoleon Solo said. “And it–”

“And what?” his partner asked.

“And it scares me,” Solo finished quietly.

TWO

In New York the two men from U.N.C.L.E. took a taxi from Kennedy International Airport to a street in the lower Fifties. Here they dismissed the cab. They went on foot past several blocks of brownstone fronts. To their right the United Nations building loomed up, a checkerboard of lighted windows against the night sky.

After a short walk the two men turned into a small shop. Peeling gold leaf spelled out *Del Floria's Tailor Shop* on the window.

Inside a little gnome of a man nodded absent-mindedly at them. They went behind the counter. A girl at the pressing machine smiled as they went by her. She touched a hidden button. Her eyes lingered a long moment on Solo's broad back before she sighed slightly and went back to work.

The two men entered a dressing room. Illya pulled the curtain shut while Solo turned one of the hooks on the wall. The back slid open.

They stepped into a room that was totally dark when the door slid shut behind them.

They waited quietly while infra-red sensors converted their bodily heat waves into a picture for a special TV surveillance scanner.

Once they were identified, the opposite wall opened. The two U.N.C.L.E. operatives stepped into a modernistic furnished office that gleamed with chrome and efficiency. A pretty girl at a desk smiled and handed each a triangular badge. It was their passport into the secret corridors of the United Command for Law and Enforcement headquarters. Strategically placed scanners would pick up the badge's transmissions.

"How are things coming along?" Solo asked her.

She looked up at him fondly. "Wonderful," she said. "I can never thank you and Mr. Kuryakin enough for getting U.N.C.L.E. to give me a job."

She spoke with a strong Irish brogue. "You earned it," Napoleon said. "If it hadn't been for you, Illya and I would probably still be floating in the Irish Sea!"

"You over-estimate what I did," she replied.

"I see you are in an argumentative mood tonight," he said brightly. "Mr. Waverly doesn't take kindly to the hired help talking when they should be

working. So what do you say to the two of us continuing the argument over a plate of Irish potatoes after we finish upstairs?"

"Just the two of us?" she said with mock concern. "What about Mr. Kuryakin? I can't split up two old friends. Can he come too?"

"He cannot!" Solo retorted. "It is obviously true, my lovely colleen, that you have never heard of the American adage that three is a crowd."

The Irish smile turned a little wistful. "Eight," she said. "or is it nine?"

"What?" Solo asked blankly.

"Is it the eighth or ninth time you two have invited me out to dinner as soon as you came from upstairs and then failed to come back."

"Well, it isn't my fault," Solo said sadly. "It is that slave driver," she said, "he has been calling down here for the last hour wanting to know if you had arrived. I'd suggest–"

"I know a brush-off when I get one," Solo said. "Come on, Illya."

The two went over to a bank of six elevators. Each was tagged with the name of one of the six sections of the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement; Section I–Policy and Operations; Section II–Operations and Enforcement; Section III–Enforcement and Intelligence; Section IV–Intelligence and Communications; Section V–Communications and Security; Section VI–Security and Personnel.

The two men took the Section I elevator and it sped them straight to the top floor. Here they stepped out into a wide corridor lined with steel doors cleverly laminated to look like oak. They walked to the far end, passing men and women of a dozen nations on the way. Organized as it was to combat international crime and aggression, U.N.C.L.E. was intentionally a multi-raced group. With headquarters-subdivisions in all the large cities of the world, its operations were unhampered by international borders.

They paused in front of the last door. They did not knock or ring a bell. Neither was necessary. Electronic guards scanned them, checked their every detail with computerized memory banks, and then automatically opened the door.

Alexander Waverly looked up as his two top operatives entered. He rose to offer them his hand, a smile on his face.

The U.N.C.L.E. operations chief was a man past middle age. His hair was iron gray and his strong face was deeply lined. Yet he did not give the appearance of being aged as much as being ageless. He had a tweedy look and his voice had a clipped, slightly British accent.

After greeting Illya Kuryakin and Napoleon Solo in a soft voice, Alexander Waverly turned, his attention caught by a red light that flashed on the console that served him for a desk.

“One moment, please,” he said to his visitors.

Waverly punched a button to complete a communications connection. A woman’s voice said, “Mr. Waverly, this is April Dancer in Paris. Mark and I are moving in on the assassins. It is only a matter of time now.”

“Good!” Waverly said. “Please keep me informed, Miss Dancer.”

He cut the trans-Atlantic connection and leaned back in his chair.

“Although Miss Dancer sounds most confident,” he said, “I think that I will send you gentlemen over to help wind up the mess. I–”

He paused, looking at Solo with disfavor. Napoleon had leaned back in his leather chair. He was staring at the floor. Obviously he had not heard a word his chief said.

“Don’t you think that is the wrong thing to do, Mr. Solo?’ he said, raising his voice.

Illya Kuryakin grinned crookedly, obviously enjoying his partner’s confusion.

“Mr. Solo! What has engaged your thoughts more important than the pursuit of these THRUSH assassination groups in Europe?”

Napoleon looked sheepish. “Well sir, it was a rather odd girl. I can’t seem to get her out of my mind. Now before you say the obvious, let me explain.”

He quickly sketched for his chief the odd actions of the girl in Los Angeles.

“Very peculiar,” Waverly said. “I find her resistance to our knockout drug very interesting. I wish you would make a full report to our chemical laboratory about it. Now enough about this girl; we have an extremely important matter to consider.”

“Yes, sir, Solo said.

“If possible, sir, we’d like permission to look into this Marsha Mallon affair when we get back. There is something decidedly curious about her.”

Alexander Waverly’s head jerked up. He shot a hard, suspicious stare at Illya. Kuryakin wondered uneasily what he had done to have such an effect on his chief.

“Marsha–*Mallon?”* Waverly said, almost accusingly. “In Hollywood?”

“

“Yes, sir,” Illya said, showing his bewilderment. “She was the girl. Nothing personal, you understand. It’s just impossible for anyone to keep moving after they receive–”

“I am aware of the implication concerning the effectiveness of a very important tool in our U.N.C.L.E. protective devices, Mr. Kuryakin. That is of secondary importance now. Is this Marsha Mallon related in any manner to a Fred B. Mallon, who has been identified to me as a movie producer?”

“Yes, sir,” Solo put in. “The police claim she was his daughter.”

“Is she an actress?”

“No, sir,” Illya said. “I remember the policeman saying that she was trying to make a career in scientific research.’

“So!” Waverly said, drawing the word out in a thoughtful manner. “In that case perhaps I will not send you to assist Miss Dancer and Mr. Slate in Paris. Perhaps–”

“Yes, sir?” Solo prompted.

“Perhaps I made an error, Mr. Solo.”

Thoughtfully the U.N.C.L.E. chief reached over and picked up a briar pipe. He leaned back in the leather upholstered chair and rubbed the bowl between his palms as he contemplated the ceiling.

“The very nature of our business brings us a great deal of peculiar information,” he said slowly. “Much of it is worthless, but occasionally it may be priceless.”

He leaned over and punched a button on the communications console in front of him. A young man’s voice said, “Yes, sir, Mr. Waverly?”

“Mr. Kovac, bring me that letter referring to Mr. Mallon, the movie producer.”

Randy Kovac, U.N.C.L.E.‘s first on-the-job trainee, brought in a folder and handed it to the chief. Waverly extracted a letter and handed it across to Solo.

The man from U.N.C.L.E. scanned it quickly, his eyes narrowing as he read: “there is a hideous threat building up because of a THRUSH offensive directed at American teenagers. Fred B. Mallon knows something about this. If he refuses to talk, force him! It is that important. You must work fast to prevent THRUSH from turning our youth into monsters!”

Wordlessly Solo passed the anonymous note to his partner. As Illya read it, Napoleon said, “After seeing the truly startling change in that young woman, I can believe they this note is telling the truth.”

“Possibly.” Waverly replied. “I had it investigated, naturally. There have been several teenage riots across the country lately. I thought there might be a connection. After all, we know THRUSH very well by now. This evil international organization is extremely clever and will take advantage of the most diabolical methods of advancing its dream of world domination.”

“What did you find out, sir?” Illya asked, passing the letter back to their chief.

Waverly laid the unlighted pipe down with an annoyed gesture.

“This handwriting was compared by electronic scanners with signatures on every income tax report filed last year. From the similarity of letters we were able to trace the writer.”

“Yes, sir?” Solo asked.

“It was Mallon himself!”

“You mean, he wrote an anonymous note asking U.N.C.L.E. to force information from *himself?”* “It would seem so,” Waverly said.

“But why?” Napoleon asked.

“I had a complete report prepared on Mr. Mallon,” Waverly said. “I found that he specialized in horror movies designed for a teenage audience. He just completed a movie called *The Million Monsters”*…

“Sounds like he rigged up an elaborate publicity stunt at U.N.C.L.E.‘s expense,” Napoleon said.

“That is what I thought and dropped the matter,” Waverly said.

He reached over and picked up the pipe again. Using the stem for a handle, he rapped the bowl on the console to punctuate his words.

“Now I am not too sure,” he replied gloomily. “I did attempt to phone Mallon directly, but I was told that he was not receiving any calls from anyone. I forgot about the matter until you mentioned this curious reaction of his daughter. No matter how publicity crazy this producer may be, I am certain he would never permit his daughter to be arrested just for a plug for a cheap picture.”

“Also,” Napoleon put in, “Her record shows that she is hardly the type to go along with such a crazy stunt.”

“The clincher is that you gave her a dose of knockout drops sufficient to render any human being unconscious. Yet she kept fighting. That is not normal and points to something sinister. THRUSH may be involved in this. If so, we face a grave danger.”

“But why did Mallon write an anonymous note urging you to investigate himself?” Illya asked. “Why didn’t he just tell you what he knows about this THRUSH thrust at America’s teenagers?”

“That is Mr. Mallon’s secret,” Waverly said. “However, I suspect that he wanted to protect himself in case this warning note fell into THRUSH hands before he could get it to me.”

“Probably so,” Solo said. “What do you want us to do?”

“Return to Hollywood. See Mallon. Also, if there are any teenage riots again anywhere in the United States, I want them carefully investigated and analyzed for possible THRUSH instigation.”

“Yes, sir,” Napoleon said, getting up. “Shall we go monster hunting, Mr. Kuryakin?”

“Let’s, Mr. Solo,” Illya replied, getting up himself.

Alexander Waverly got up, “Gentlemen,” he said gravely, “I know it is unscientific to depend on hunches. But I have an uneasy feeling that this may prove to be the most difficult case we have ever encountered.”

“If it does not prove to be a publicity stunt for a film after all,” Napoleon returned cautiously.

“Do you believe it is, Mr. Solo?”

“No, sir!” Napoleon replied. “I’m a hunch player too.”

“Good luck,” Waverly said. “You’re going to need it.”

THREE

When they arrived back at Los Angeles International Airport Napoleon went directly to a telephone. When the operator refused to give him the unlisted private telephone number of Producer Fred B. Mallon, Solo gave the chief operator a code. Instantly the objections vanished. He was switched immediately to the producer's phone.

It rang and rang. Napoleon was on the verge of hanging up when someone picked up the phone.

"Yes?" It was a girl's voice. It was strained and held an undertone of terror.

"This is Napoleon Solo," the man from U.N.C.L.E. said. "I'd like to speak to Mr. Mallon for a moment. I–"

"He isn't speaking to anyone," she said hastily.

"This is an official government matter," Solo went on. "We are interested in Mr. Mallon producing a propaganda film for showing–"

The phone went dead. The banging in his ear suggested that she threw thee receiver in the cradle with a savage force.

"Yeah?" Illya asked.

"A girl," Napoleon said. "At least her voice sounded young. And it sounded fearful and angry. According to her, Mr. Mallon isn't talking to anybody."

"And according to N. Solo?"

"He is going to talk whether she or he likes it!" the man from U.N.C.L.E. snapped.

"I –*Look out,* Napo–"

Napoleon tried to whirl, but Illya Kuryakin was faster. He grabbed his companion's coat lapel and swung him around in a savage judo throw.

In the background there was a deafening blast of gunfire. A bullet just missed Napoleon's head as Illya threw him back out of the line of fire.

The slug smashed into the glass door of the telephone booth. Illya dodged, falling flat on the airline terminal floor. He snaked his body around, pulling his U.N.C.L.E. Special from its shoulder holster under his coat.

As he jerked his head around, seeking a target, he glimpsed Solo, who was on his knees pulling his own Special.

“Wham!”

A steel-jacketed slug scraped the fleshy part of his thigh. He was knocked back flat. Oblivious of the pain, he spun his prone body around.

He saw Solo fire and heard a scream. A burly teenager who looked like a fugitive from Muscle Beach collapsed. Two companions behind him stumbled over his falling body. They all had long hair and were bare-footed. All three had guns.

Napoleon hurled himself at them. His frantically kicking shoe caught the gun wrist of one. The gun spun across the floor. The second gunman tried to blast the charging Kuryakin. Solo hit him with a football tackle.

The berserk hipster went down. His head cracked against the hard floor. Blood streamed from the cut. His eyes rolled back in his head. But like the girl the day before, the would-be killer’s body acted independently of its unconscious mind.

His gun was jarred from his hand when he fell, but he hurled himself on Solo. The other caught Illya, who was at a disadvantage because of his own bleeding wound.

He clubbed Illya to his knees, but as he fell Kuryakin threw his arms about his assailant’s knees and knocked the THRUSH zombie off balance.

Two airline employees came running to their assistance. The man Solo shot loomed up in their way. He was streaming blood, but it didn’t slow him. He grabbed one of the oncoming men, lifted him and smashed him into his companion. Then he whirled to throw himself at Kuryakin.

Solo slipped between the two men who rushed him. He whirled, shooting a frantic glance around to see how Illya was faring. Kuryakin was in the grasp of the wounded zombie.

“You can kill them and they still won’t lie down and die!” Solo thought frantically. “We’ve got to get out of here. We’re no match for them!”

He ducked a clubbing blow that would have taken his head off his shoulders if it had landed. He grabbed the swinging arm and slammed his attacker into the other assailant. They collided with a bone-shaking crash and fell.

Napoleon turned, grabbed the long hair of the bleeding human monster throttling Kuryakin. The streaming blood was sapping the berserk hippie’s strength although his controlled mind kept driving him forward.

His grip on Illya broke as Solo pushed him around and slammed him into the two others who were moving in again.

“Come on Illya!” he yelled.

Kuryakin tried to follow, but his wounded leg buckled. Solo grabbed a heavy sand-filled basin used for cigarette stubs and hurled it. The man it hit collapsed with a broken leg, but still he tried to crawl.

Solo grabbed Illya’s arm and swung him up over his shoulder in the fireman’s carry. He started for the door in a lumbering run.

Two of their assailants started after them. The third had now lost so much blood he couldn’t stand, but he kept trying to crawl. The terrible force that drove him would not let him rest, even as he was dying.

There was a photographer in the doorway. He was holding up a camera shaped something like a press box.

“Never mind the pictures!” Solo yelled at him. “Give us a hand!”

The photographer ignored him. He stepped back hastily out of the way as the two hippies charged down on Illya and Napoleon. Handicapped as he was by his wounded companion, Solo couldn’t move fast enough. The nearest hippie charged into him.

He tried to duck, but Kuryakin’s weight was too much for him. He stumbled and pitched into the photographer. The Hippie swung wildly, missed and lunged past, bowling over the photographer and Solo.

Napoleon twisted frantically, but as he jerked himself up he realized that the fight had gone out of their two assailants. The first lay across Kuryakin, unmoving. The second stopped in his forward charge. The berserk expression on his face faded, turning into bewilderment.

The photographer pulled back, clutching his camera box. The bellows hung down from the broken bed. He swung the box as if he intended to strike Solo, but thought better of it. He broke and ran.

Napoleon shot a quick glance at the two hippies. They seemed to be out, but from past experience he didn’t care to trust appearances. He kept a wary eye on them as he went over to Illya.

His companion’s trouser leg was soaked with blood.

“Bad?” he asked.

“No,” Illya said. “Painful as hell, but I can walk if I don’t push it too hard.” He pulled up his pants leg and pressed a wadded handkerchief down on the wound to staunch the blood flow. Solo kept an anxious eye on the two prone hippies.

Outside a screaming police car pulled up with a red light flashing. “Where have they been? On vacation?” Illya asked sarcastically.

Napoleon looked at his watch. “It does seem an age, but did you know it has been exactly three minutes since those hippies ran amok on us?”

“Three minutes!” Illya said wonderingly. “It seems like three weeks.”

Solo nodded soberly. “What made them attack us?”

“That’s easy to answer. They think we’re on their track. What isn’t so easy to answer is what gives them the power to keep going? It isn’t human.”

“I know,” Napoleon replied. “And just as baffling is why they ran out of steam there at the last. The girl didn’t, you remember. She was still fighting with the strength of ten when they crammed her in that car and drove away.”

“I know that,” Illya said, grimacing as he extended his wounded leg. “There is something very peculiar about all this. I’d feel better about it if I just knew what we were fighting.”

“If THRUSH is mixed up in this as Mallon claimed, then we can be assured that it is something diabolical.”

Illya looked at the policemen hurrying across toward them. He nodded. “I know,” he said. “And it scares me. Somehow, the title of that movie, *The Million Monsters*, keeps bugging me. If THRUSH can turn a million people as crazy as these hippies and that girl were, then we really have something to worry about. They would have an army of rioters that could completely wreck the United States.”

“Not just the United States, Illya,” Solo said, giving his companion a dark, brooding look. “If they can monsterize a million youth here, they can do it anywhere in the world! THRUSH has been seeking to dominate the world for a long time. They just may have found the right gimmick at last–unless we can stop them!”

ACT II

THE MONSTERS!

Illya and Napoleon accompanied the police back to the Los Angeles Police Headquarters. Interrogation of the prisoners produced nothing. Each seemed genuinely surprised at his actions and could remember nothing of the attack on the two men from U.N.C.L.E.

“It was the same with Marsha Mallon,” Sergeant Leffler of the riot squad told Solo. “We questioned her very closely. She indignantly denied trying to fire a gun in the airline terminal. She could remember nothing until her frenzy broke in the patrol car as she was being carried from the airport.”

“These two evidently were trying to murder Illya and me,” Solo said. “But Miss Mallon was not attacking us until we tried to stop her. Was she after somebody? Or was her attack spontaneous, directed at nothing or everything?”

“We don’t know,” Leffler said. “We do know that a well-known European film distributor was at the service counter she aimed at. He had been in Hollywood to see her father about foreign distribution of Mallon’s latest film. There might or might not be a connection.”

“Was the film called *The Million Monsters?”* Illya asked.

“I believe it was,” the riot squad man said. “Another of those cheap horror movies.”

“He must have been frightened by the commotion. He broke and ran. We traced him later. He took a rental car from the airport to Tijuana. From there he took a plane to Mexico City and then to Paris.”

“I see,” Illya said thoughtfully. “It would appear that there might be a connection.”

“Possibly,” the policeman said. “But we must have better evidence before we can ask INTERPOL to investigate.”

He paused and added in an off-hand manner: “Of course, U.N.C.L.E. is not bound by international restrictions. If you–”

Napoleon nodded without committing himself to the hint.

“What happened to Miss Mallon?” he asked.

“Her father’s lawyer got her released. She seemed genuinely bewildered. From her past history, I am inclined to believe she really didn’t realize at all what she was doing.”

“Very strange,” Solo said thoughtfully. “Was there evidence of any kind of narcotic influence?”

Leffler shook his head.

“None,” he said. “It was just as if something had taken possession of her brain for a short time.”

“I can understand something like that happening with hippies like those brutes who attacked Napoleon and me,” Illya said. “But if they can possess the mind of a woman like Miss Mallon was reputed to be–”

He left the rest unfinished. Leffler nodded glumly.

“That is right,” he said. “She was definitely not the beatnik type. She was an intellectual and reputedly quite a brilliant research scientist. If they can grab her brain, they can grab anybody’s.”

“Including yours and mine,” Leffler replied.

“Have there been any police reports involving her father in the last year?” Solo asked.

“I’ll check it out for you, but I haven’t heard of any,” Leffler said.

“How do you feel?” Napoleon asked Illya.

“Great!” Kuryakin said hastily. His leg wound had been dressed by the police surgeon. He was told before that he could walk, but to take things as easy as possible.

Solo got up. “Well, it’s been a hard day. I think we’ll turn in. You can call us at the Wiltshire Hilton if anything turns up.”

He and Kuryakin took the elevator to the ground floor of the high-rise police building. As the elevator door closed behind them, Solo opened his coat. A silver fountain pen was clipped to his shirt and a six inch antenna was extended from it.

He removed the pen. Holding it closer to his mouth, he spoke into the super-miniaturized microphone inside the worldwide reception pen communicator.

“Were you able to pick up both sides of our conversation, Mr. Waverly?” he asked.

“Yes. Mr. Solo,” Alexander Waverly’s voice came in, low but distinct, from New York. “I fed your conversation directly into the probability computer.”

“Yes sir,” Solo asked, “and what was the result?”

“After weighing all the facts we have gathered so far, the computer lists an international THRUSH threat as the number one probability. Also, our contacts within THRUSH itself report highly secret conferences in the upper levels and evidence of great excitement.

“It sounds ominous, sir,” Napoleon said soberly. “Yes, Mr. Solo,” Waverly replied. “We can no longer consider this affair as just something to investigate because of its strangeness. It has now become a matter of the utmost urgency.”

“We will give it top priority, sir,” Napoleon replied.

“Do that Mr. Solo,” Waverly said to his chief enforcement officer. “This situation worries me more than any situation we have ever faced.”

“We are going out now to Mallon’s house,” Solo said. “I was not able to talk to him by telephone.”

“That seems to be the best course. Obviously he wants our help or he would not have sent that oddly worded note,” Waverly said. “I am certain he did it only to throw THRUSH off the scent.”

“That is why I think he will see us in person even though he refused to come to the telephone,” Napoleon said.

“Excellent, Mr. Solo,” Alexander Waverly said. “And in the morning, after you talk with Mallon, I think it wise for Mr. Kuryakin to go to Paris and interview this foreign film distributor.”

Mallon’s home was in Beverly Hills. A tremendous mansion of the old fashioned type, it sat behind a high ivied wall in a landscaped private park. As they approached in a rented car, Solo thought that it looked like a museum piece. It belonged to an era of the silent film. Solo almost expected to see Douglas Fairbanks vault over the wall and Mary Pickford to swish her golden curls under the flowered arbor.

The huge wrought iron gates were open. The men from U.N.C.L.E. drove up the curving road. Suddenly the car lights picked up the running figure of a girl. She flashed across the driveway in front of them. Napoleon slammed on the brakes. The front fender missed her by inches.

She did not look back–indeed, she seemed unconscious of how narrowly she had missed death.

Kuryakin whistled softly.

“Did you see how she how she filled out that bikini!” he said appreciatively.

“No!” Napoleon said shortly. “I was too busy trying to avoid seeing how well she would fill a coffin! Did you get a look at her face?”

“No,” Illya said regretfully. “But if it looked as good as the rest of her–”

“Probably a fugitive from some Hollywood party,” Solo said. He started the car. Kuryakin looked back, hoping to get another view of the bikini-clad fugitive.

Napoleon stopped the car in front of the mansion. The front door was open. Interior light streamed out into the night.

“The girl probably left it open when she fled,” Solo observed. “She must have gotten quite a shock to leave that fast.”

“Well, you know what they say about these Hollywood parties!” Illya said.

“What I’m wondering is whether she knew what she was doing,” Napoleon said. “She seemed not to see the car at all. Could she be caught in this same compulsive force that gripped Mallon’s daughter and those hippies?”

“Possibly,” Illya said. “If so—”

“I’m thinking the same thing,” Solo said grimly. “Come on!”

They went to the door. Illya looked inside as Solo punched the door bell. There was no answer. Napoleon waited impatiently and then rang again.

“You mean there isn’t even a servant in this monstrous pile?” he said irritably.

“Well, we can either go back to the hotel or invade the gentleman’s privacy,” Illya said with a sour grin. “I know you would never be so ungentlemanly as to enter a house without an invitation.”

He stepped inside, adding, “So it is fortunate you have me along. I have no such inhibitions!”

Solo grinned crookedly and followed his partner into the house. They stopped inside, looking around warily. The foyer opened into an old fashioned sunken drawing room. At the back a movie-set staircase swept in a grand curve to a balcony on the second floor.

Just beyond the overturned table was a wet red spot. Solo knelt down and looked at it carefully.

“Blood!” he said tersely, looking up at his companion. “And very fresh.”

“It picks up over here,” Illya Kuryakin said. “It looks like whoever was bleeding crawled through that door yonder. Come on!”

The last he added back over his shoulder as he strode after the trail of blood.

They passed through the door into a small library of the old fashioned book-walled type. A man’s body was sprawled on the floor beside a littered library table.

The body lay on its face. The arms were outstretched. The right hand gripped a large one-sheet movie poster. Across the paper a myriad hideous faces leered out of the murky shadows at a frightened bikini-clad beauty. Across the top of the poster splashing red letters proclaimed: Fred B. Mallon presents *The Million Monsters* with Doris Taylor.

Smaller letters immodestly claimed this to be the most frightening film ever made.

Solo stopped and felt the man’s wrist.

“Dead?” Illya asked.

Napoleon nodded, his face grim. “Do you know Mallon by sight?”

“No,” Illya said, “but I’ll bet my last cookie that this is he.”

“I think so too,” Solo said. “Then there was something to that cryptic note he sent Waverly. THRUSH is behind this thing.”

He pulled the pen communicator from his pocket and made an immediate contact with New York.

“Mr. Waverly,” he said when the transcontinental connection was complete. “We have found Fred Mallon dead–murdered!”

“I see,” Waverly said slowly. “Anything that might indicate a tie-in between his death and the action of his daughter?”

“Perhaps,” Solo said, turning to stare at the corpse. “The indications are that he dragged himself from the drawing room to the library. He pulled a proof sheet of a poster for his latest film off the table and died with it clutched in his hand.”

“Was this the *Million Monsters* film?” Waverly asked.

“Yes, sir,” Solo replied.

“Then it appears that Mallon was trying to leave a message behind, perhaps a clue to the secret behind this terrible affair.”

“That is what we believe, sir,” Napoleon said.

“Very well, I will have analysts view this film at regular theater screenings,” Waverly said. “We will see if there are any clues hidden in the

film itself. In the meantime, you and Mr. Kuryakin carry on. And Mr. Solo–”

“Yes, sir?”

“Be careful! My secret information is that THRUSH has pulled in every member of its liquidation squad for a top priority job.”

“And what is that?” Napoleon asked.

“We do not know, but I suspect the target is two U.N.C.L.E. operatives. You and Mr. Kuryakin! Watch out!”

TWO

“We had better notify the Beverly Hills police,” Illya Kuryakin said as Napoleon Solo collapsed the pen communicator antenna.

“I suppose so,” Solo said. “Why don’t you nose around the drawing room and see what you can find out before the police arrive.”

“What are you going to do?” Kuryakin asked suspiciously. “If you have any ideas about chasing a wild bikini, forget it. She is surely gone by now. Besides, I am better fitted by temperament, training and definitely inclination to pursue that kind of suspect.”

“I don’t doubt the inclination, but I am not sure about the training,” Solo retorted, “Just take things easy here. That leg of yours might stand up to plowing around the man-made jungle that surrounds this place, but there’s no point in straining it. We may need to run, if Waverly is right.”

Kuryakin looked soberly at his companion. “They may be lying in wait for you,” he said. “That girl could be the killer–or she could be bait for a trap. She may have run in front of your car to be sure we spotted her.”

“I suppose your right,” Solo said. “It could be a trap. There is one sure way of finding out.”

Illya stared questioningly. “Yeah,” Napoleon said. “I can stick my neck out. If something bangs down on it, then it was a trap.”

Illya started to reply, but the slight lift of Solo’s eyebrows tipped him off to keep quiet.

“See you later,” Solo said. “I’m walking down the driveway to where we saw that girl run past.”

Solo had walked to the door before turning and throwing this last statement back at his partner. Illya nodded uneasily. Obviously Solo had done this to give himself an excuse for raising his voice. He had wanted someone to hear him.

Thoughtfully Kuryakin looked down at the corpse and then let his eye pass carelessly past the window as he scanned the room. He was certain that Solo had seen something at the window that caused him to act as he had.

Playing out his part to keep the person–if there was one–outside from becoming suspicious, Illya got down on his knees beside the dead man. He turned so he could watch the window from the corner of his eye. He bent

over as if scanning the *Million Monsters* poster, but he brought his right hand up where it could slip rapidly inside his jacket. There the hard weight of an U.N.C.L.E. Special rested in its uniquely designed holster.

Time ticked away slowly. He wondered if he had been mistaken.

Then suddenly the sharp crack of a revolver shattered the silence. Illya jerked out the Special. He jumped back and up, hitting the wall switch.

As the room plunged in darkness he moved swiftly to the window. The glass shattered under the impact of another shot. Illya jumped back, throwing up his arm to protect his face from flying glass.

"Don't shoot, Illya!"

It was Solo's voice calling frantically from outside.

Kuryakin ran to the window again. Through the broken glass he saw the dim figure of a woman racing across the lawn. He saw Napoleon fire at her.

The U.N.C.L.E. Special made no sound except a loud hiss which told Kuryakin that Solo had switched from bullets to needle thin knockout projectiles. These could stun, but not kill.

But the light was too poor and the girl too fast. The darkness swallowed her before Solo could fire again.

Kuryakin pulled open the window to avoid cutting himself on the broken glass. He threw his good leg over the window sill and laboriously dropped into a flower bed.

Solo was running after the girl. Kuryakin knew he could not keep up. His wounded leg handicapped him, but he followed to keep any accomplice of the girl's from coming in on Solo from the rear.

Suddenly there was a roar behind them. Flames shot out the shattered window of the library.

"They're trying to destroy evidence of the murder!" Napoleon shouted. "Forget the girl! This is more important."

Kuryakin hobbled toward the window, hoping he could get in and drag the body out before the flames reached it. But just before Solo caught up with him, there was another explosion inside the death room.

The walls shook. They bulged out and started to fall.

"Look out!" Solo yelled.

Kuryakin saw the danger and was running as hard as his wounded leg would permit. The entire side of the six story mansion was toppling over on top of them!

He knew he couldn’t make it. It was too far to run, even if he had not been injured.

“The tree!” Solo shouted. “Get behind the tree, Illya!”

Kuryakin staggered. The first pieces of blazing debris were starting to batter down on them. A brick hit just in front of Solo, bounced on the thick grass and struck Napoleon’s knee. He fell, caught himself and rolled to his feet like a tumbler.

Illya’s wounded leg cramped. The stiffened muscles threw him off stride. He sprawled flat. Solo turned to help him.

“Keep going! Keep going!” “Illya gasped. “I’ll make it!”

He rolled over, catching a glimpse of a huge concrete beam teetering on the edge of the collapsing roof.

It came crashing down. Illya scrambled frantically to get out of the way. He followed Solo’s lead. The two trapped men leaped behind a huge spreading oak. They pressed hard against the trunk on the opposite side from the fire.

Illya looked up. The flaming building made a hellish backdrop for the falling pillar.

“It’s going to hit us!” He gasped.

“Don’t run!” Solo shouted.

He had seen the murderous shower of bricks and burning debris on each side of them. It was suicide to leave the doubtful protection of the great tree. The strong limbs and heavy foliage were their only hope.

The beam crashed into the tree. The smashing, splintering of tortured wood was louder than the roar of the flames. The tree trunk shivered. The huge limb that had protected them from falling brick cracked under the impact of the concrete beam.

“Look out, Napoleon!” Illya yelled.

It was too late. Solo tried to duck. A piece of the limb struck him. He plunged to the ground unconscious.

Kuryakin sprang back as the splintered end jabbed murderously at his chest. He fell. Two bricks bounced off his shoulder. A burning door struck the shuddering tree trunk and shattered into a hundred blazing fragments.

Illya looked up fearfully. The concrete pillar was teetering precariously on the stump of the shattered tree. Kuryakin took a deep breath and shuddered. The unconscious Solo was directly in its line of fall.

Illya tried to get to his feet, but his leg wound was bleeding again. His right shoulder was bruised so badly by the bricks that he could scarcely move it.

Unable to walk, he started to crawl toward his unconscious companion. The second story floor of the mansion collapsed. A piece of burning timber hurtled toward them. It struck the ground short, but bounced and fell across Solo's legs.

Illya snaked his body around and kicked it off with his toe. Then, flopping around again, he grabbed Solo's arms. He tried to get to his feet, but couldn't.

His breath was rasping in his throat. His entire body was a mass of protesting aches. He took a deep, shuddering breath and jerked a handkerchief from his pocket. He quickly knotted it around his unconscious friend's wrists.

He looked up as a violent crack sounded from the shattered tree. The poorly balanced beam slipped an inch.

Sweat dripped from Kuryakin's face. He slipped his head through Napoleon's arms, letting the bound wrists fall against the back of his neck. Then he tried to crawl and drag Solo out of the line of the beam's fall.

He lacked the strength to drag the unconscious man from U.N.C.L.E. He collapsed on top of Solo. He twisted his head, shooting another fearful look upward. The beam was slipping. It was teetering too far now to hold. This was the end. It was coming down straight on them.

In a last desperate attempt to save themselves, he pressed his body tightly against the unconscious man. He threw his arms about Solo's body and tightened his knees about his friend's hips.

Then he twisted frantically, trying to roll the both of them over.

Above him, the last bit of stump holding the beam gave way!

Kuryakin got over on his back; then shoving with all his dwindling strength, he made another roll.

With a final chilling *crack!* that momentarily blotted out the roar of the flames, the last remaining branch gave way. The huge pillar, as large around as a man's body, crashed down.

It smashed into the ground exactly where they had been. Illya, shaking and gasping for breath from his superhuman effort to get himself and Solo out of the way, collapsed. They were so close to the fallen column that they

touched it. The edge of his open jacket was under the beam. They had missed death by a space equal to the thickness of a piece of paper.

He lay for a moment, trying to get his strength before making another move. The heat of the fire was terrific. It was scorching. He shakily pulled Solo's coat up to protect his friend's face.

Then not knowing if the other man was alive or dead, he gingerly reached over and touched Solo's neck, seeking the vein to feel for a pulse.

In the distance he could see the flash of car lights in the driveway. Above the roar of the fire he heard the scream of fire sirens.

He pushed himself shakily, tugging to get his coat from under the concrete mass. Fire was burning all around them. The tree branches and thick leaves had prevented them from being covered when the wall caved in.

But this now seemed only a momentary respite. They were almost encircled by flaming debris. The firemen, intent on getting water on the blaze to contain the fire, had not seen them.

He tried to yell, but his voice was swallowed in the crackling roar of collapsing walls in the blazing house.

He felt for the U.N.C.L.E. Special, hoping a shot would attract attention. But in the fall and scramble it had been lost.

Illya looked around frantically. He could still save himself. He was battered and weakened, but had strength to get out himself.

Provided he would abandon his companion. That, he knew, would mean Napoleon's death. The fire around them, while hot and scorching, would not reach them. If he abandoned his companion to run for help, there was no danger of the abandoned man burning. But–fire itself was not the danger. As the streams from the fire hose hit the fire, great masses of smoke were erupting up from the blaze.

Already Kuryakin was coughing badly. Within a couple of minutes it would be suffocating. He knew that if he left Solo long enough to get help, he would return to a dead man!

THREE

For a breathless moment Kuryakin stood there beside the prone figure of his companion in so many past adventures. Suddenly an idea penetrated his fagged mind. He grabbed the pen-communicator from his pocket. Jerking the antenna up, he called hoarsely: “Mr. Waverly! Can you–”

He broke off in a fit of strangling coughing as a cloud of smoke engulfed him. He dropped to the ground where the air was clearer. “Mr. Kuryakin?” Waverly’s anxious voice came over the super-miniaturized transmitter. “What is the matter? Answer, please!”

“We are–”

Kuryakin went into another fit of coughing before he could control himself sufficiently to choke out the words: “Solo is unconscious and I’m too weak to carry him out. We’re surrounded by fire at Mallon’s estate.”

He paused, coughing again.

“Mr. Kuryakin! Quickly! What can we do for you?” Waverly called his voice thick with anxiety. “I can radio Los Angeles to get the fire department out.”

“The fire department is here!” Illya said thickly. “But they can’t see us. Can you alert them that we are here? I can get out, but I can’t get Napoleon out.”

“Hold the connection!” Waverly said crisply.

Illya heard him speaking rapidly into another connection: “Get me a direct beam to Los Angeles! Quickly! Every second counts!”

Two ticks of a clock later, Illya heard him say: “Los Angeles operator? This is an emergency. The fire department, please!”

The connection was completed in record time. Illya heard Waverly sketch their plight in a few crisp words. The fire department dispatcher said hurriedly, “We will radio the battalion chief at the blaze.”

Illya heard a click and then the voice of the dispatcher relayed from Los Angeles to New York and back to him in Los Angeles via the U.N.C.L.E. pen communicator.

“New York reports that there are two men trapped under the splintered oak on the west side of the building,” the dispatcher said into his radio.

“New York?” The amazed voice of the assistant fire chief in charge of the engines called back over his walkie-talkie. “What does New York know about what is going on out here? Somebody is pulling your leg.”

“No, sir. The call is authentic. It is no hoax.”

“How do you know?” the assistant chief asked in a rasping voice. “I got work to do. I can’t–”

“The call came in on a preemption code that cut off every telephone interference across the country,” the dispatcher said. “It takes somebody mighty important to do that. The emergency code he used is just under a presidential preemption.”

Illya heard the chief whistle. “That *is* somebody important. Hey, Gerrity! Smith! Snap on a smoke mask and see if there are any persons under that splintered oak. Get a move on. It’s important.”

Then Illya Kuryakin heard him say plaintively, “But I’d like to know how anybody in New York knew what was going on here?”

“ESP, maybe?” the dispatcher suggested.

Then two men came charging through the smoke and fire. Within seconds smoke masks were slipped over Illya’s and Solo’s faces. They were quickly carried to safety.

The department’s first aid man brought Napoleon Solo back to consciousness. Napoleon sat up, gingerly touching the bloody knot on the side of his head.

“What happened?” he asked thickly.

Then before Illya could reply, he added, “When did you get to be twins?”

Kuryakin knelt down beside him. He extracted a paper thin pill from an inner compartment of his wallet. He stripped off the cellophane covering and handed it to Solo.

Napoleon downed it and lay back with his eyes closed for a full minute. Then he sat up. “Those energy pills really work,” he said in a clear voice. “I feel like getting up and running the hundred yard dash.”

“Take it easy,” Illya said, downing one of the pills himself to ease the ache in his legs. “You know they don’t put anything into you. They just make you forget there isn’t any juice left in the battery.”

“I know,” Napoleon said. “What happened?”

Illya shrugged. “After you laid down on me, there wasn’t anybody to tell me what to do. So I sat down beside you and waited until you decided

to get back in the act."

Solo got shakily to his feet and gave Illya a hard look from under raised eyebrows.

"That sounds like you," he said sarcastically. "What about the girl? Did you get a good look at her face?"

Illya shook his head.

"But don't worry," he said with a grin. "I'd recognize that bikini anywhere. What do we do now? Mallon's body is lost–if it is Mallon."

"I think it was," Solo said slowly. "And I think that babe in the next-to-bare bikini is the same one who tried to do us in."

"But that was Mallon's daughter. She wouldn't–" Solo paused and then added thoughtfully, "Or would she?"

"I'm not sure it was she who did the killing," Illya said. "There was someone else in the house. She could not have got back in time to set off the explosion."

"Well, let's worry about it in the morning," Solo said. "As soon as these super-aspirin lose their punch, we're going to be dead. Let's get some sleep."

They started back to their hotel in a car provided by the Beverly Hills police. As they drove, Solo dictated a quick report which he transmitted over the pen communicator to U.N.C.L.E. headquarters in New York and recorded on a sub-miniature tape recorder hidden by U.N.C.L.E. laboratory ingenuity in his cigarette lighter. This tape he passed to the policeman accompanying them to aid the Beverly Hills homicide and arson squads in their investigation of the murder and fire.

Shortly after they started the driver picked up a newscast on the car radio. Solo leaned back and listened intently.

"A two-million dollar fire swept the Beverly Hills mansion of motion picture producer Fred B. Mallon tonight. Firemen are still fighting the four alarm blaze," the newscaster reported.

"Unconfirmed reports claim that the fire is arson, started to cover up the murder of the noted producer. The mysterious events follow the arrest yesterday of Mallon's daughter, who apparently ran amok at Los Angeles International Airport. Miss Mallon disappeared following her release by Los Angeles police."

After a commercial break the announcer added, "Here is a later bulletin on the Mallon murder. Police report that they are seeking the producer's

daughter for questioning in connection with her father's death. Beverly Hills homicide investigators report that her peculiar actions during the last few days make her a prime suspect in the murder."

"They are taking the wrong tack," Illya said with a positive shake of his head. "She is surely involved, but she is a victim."

Solo grinned at him. "Would you be so ready to leap to her defense if she were homely instead of a raving beauty?" he asked.

"I most certainly–" Illya began.

"What's that?" Solo broke in sharply.

Illya, sparked by the strange note in his companion's voice, turned quickly. The car was on Sunset Boulevard moving through the unincorporated section known as Sunset Strip.

The first thing that caught Kuryakin's eye was a theater marquee flashing the words "Fred B Mallon's Triumph of Terror, *The Million Monsters!"*

"It seems to hit us everywhere we go." Solo said.

"The show must just be turning out," Illya said, motioning toward the crowd pouring from the theater and overflowing into the street.

The driver had to slow up because of the jam. The crowd was moving in a rapid flow as if hurrying to catch a train.

Then suddenly an electric change went through the tightly packed mob. A woman screamed and her frantic cry drowned in the sudden roaring fury of the tightly packed teenagers.

They started milling and yelling. Traffic came to a dead halt.

"It's another of those miserable teenage riots!" their driver said. "Roll up the windows fast. These kids are crazy when they go on a bust."

A police whistle shrilled in the distance and a police patrol siren whined.

"The sheriff has his hands full," their Beverly Hills police driver said. "I don't envy him. This little fracas looks like it is going to be a whizzer!"

"Anyway we can help?" Illya asked, uneasily watching the growing fury of the milling crowd.

"Just keep out of it," the driver said. "This is unincorporated territory. It does not belong to either Beverly Hills or Los Angeles. It is strictly the sheriff's jurisdiction. The city police have no authority here."

"We can make what is known as a citizen's arrest," Solo said.

“Stay out of it,” the policeman cautioned. “You can’t win. Let them alone. They’ll scream a little and maybe break a few glass fronts, but that’ll be all. They’re just blowing off a little steam.”

Solo looked out at the giant marquee with its *Million Monsters* sign.

“I wonder–” he said softly.

“I’m thinking the same thing,” Illya replied. “And if it is true and this bunch are caught in the same frenzy that gripped Marsha Mallon and those hippies who jumped us at the terminal–”

He left the rest unsaid. Solo said nothing, but Illya could see his companion’s jaw tighten.

“Then we better get out of here–fast!” he said.

Illya Kuryakin nodded. The car was stalled between the movie goers packed in the street ahead and the heavy traffic stopped behind them. He pushed the latch on the car door. Solo leaned forward to follow him.

As they started to move, the ugly rumblings in the crowd suddenly exploded. The mob surged forward. A red-faced man rammed the half opened car door with his body and slammed it on Kuryakin. Solo caught a glimpse of the car ahead as a crazy-faced youth grabbed a street trash can and hurled it through the window in a crushing blow at the driver.

Their own car rocked. A jam of screaming youths grabbed the front bumper and raised it off the ground. Solo tried to open the door, but the wild pack was pressed too tightly.

Then the group in front dropped their hold on the bumper. The car fell three feet with a bounce that threw Solo against the windshield. Illya hit against the driver.

It was impossible to get out of the car now. The frenzied mob was too thick. Napoleon Solo grabbed his U.N.C.L.E. Special, flipping the cartridge switch from steel slugs to the needle-thin knockout pellets. But before he could use it, crazed hands converged on the side of the car. Under their savage push the car slowly teetered over on two wheels.

“Roll down the window!” Solo yelled.

As Illya spun the crank, Napoleon fired six of the plastic needle pellets with their stunning anesthetic into the mob pushing against the car.

But it was like dipping up the ocean with a cup. As soon as one dropped unconscious, there were three to take his place. The three men in the car were completely trapped.

The car ahead burst into flames. From somewhere in the crushing mass a gun fired. The windshield shattered. And then the car went over.

Solo was hurled back on top of Kuryakin. The police driver tried to get out through the broken window glass. As his head cleared the car, a screaming maniac slammed him in the throat with the jagged end of a broken bottle.

He fell back. Illya tried to cover the wound with his hand to stop the spurting blood. But the sharp glass had torn through the jugular vein.

The car was on its side and the gasoline poured out of the carburetor onto the hot engine. It burst into flames.

“We’ve got to get out of here!” Illya gasped.

“If we do, they’ll tear us to pieces. That theater must have held fifteen hundred people and every one of them is jammed in this street and each one is a raging lunatic! We haven’t a chance, Illya!”

“I’ve heard that before!” his companion shot back. “This is your turn to furnish the brains. Remember, those energy pills we took only work for a short time. We can’t take another for four hours. We’re to be so weak we couldn’t fight off a baby in a strait jacket in just a short time.”

“Well, Illya–” Solo stopped to fire a paralyzing pellet into a distorted face that leaned in from the broken window on top to jab at them with a piece of iron pipe.

“The only chance we got is to use tear gas,” Solo said hurriedly.

“You got to do better than that if we are going to get out of this mess,” Illya retorted, his grim face dripping with sweat from the heat of the burning engine. “Any gas close enough to do us any good will blind us as well. I thought of that. No good, buddy!”

“Good or bad, it’s all we got left!” Solo replied. “Listen, get a good look and set your bearings straight. I’m going to lob off every pellet I got. We’ll be blinded, but we’ll have the advantage of knowing where we’re going. Just close your eyes tight and plow straight for that drug store. We might make it.”

“The knockout drops didn’t work on them,” Illya panted. “Maybe the tear gas won’t either.” “Maybe not, “Solo said grimly. “But that is another detail. Are you ready?”

“No. But I’m even less ready to stay here and get my goose cooked. Get moving!”

ACT III
THE MONSTER MASTER

Napoleon Solo quickly extracted the super-miniature tear gas pellets from his wallet. No larger than buck shot, they packed an ultra-concentrated chemical formula that reacted with air to create a blinding cloud more powerful than ordinary tear gas. It was another of the special U.N.C.L.E. protective devices carried by all Alexander Waverly's operatives.

"Hold my hand," he said to Kuryakin as he prepared to hurl the bead sized bombs.

"I'm not that scared!" Illya retorted.

"Don't try to be funny!" Napoleon snapped. "I just don't want us to get separated in this damned mob!"

He stepped on the steering column and raised his head through the broken door. But as he drew back his hand to throw the tear gas bombs a thrown bottle smashed into his shoulder.

He was knocked back. His head hit the edge of the door. He fell on top of Illya. The tiny tear gas pellets dropped from his hand. A faint green smoke burst out, spreading rapidly under the force of the highly compressed gas.

Instantly both men's eyes were streaming. Completely blinded and racked by coughing, they pushed their way out of the crumpled wreck.

It was impossible to tell immediately what effect the gas was having on the teenage monsters. The gas was spreading rapidly from the car, but the men from U.N.C.L.E. had gotten a worse dose because the pellets were crushed right beside them.

The two men clung to the top of the overturned car, trying to get some idea of what was happening.

"I think it's affecting them," Illya gasped.

"But we d-don't know how far it has spread!" Solo choked. "But come on! There's only one way to find out if we're going to get out of this mess alive!"

Grasping his U.N.C.L.E. Special with its stunning needle pellet ammunition in one hand, and holding Illya Kuryakin's hand with the other, Solo slid off the car.

Instantly they were jammed in between a thick press of screaming, weeping teenagers-turned-monsters. They were slammed and buffeted as

the blinded mob stumbled about.

A shrieking girl collided with Solo. She whirled in uncontrolled frenzy and tried to claw his face. Napoleon stumbled, falling to his knees. A boy, weaving drunkenly, fell across him. Illya jerked frantically to pull Napoleon to his feet before he was stomped in the milling mob.

Blinded, choking, the two men from U.N.C.L.E. hunched their shoulders and charged ahead. They crashed into equally blind and stumbling young men and women. Some they bowled over in their rush. Some they bounced off. One knocked Illya completely off his feet. Before Solo could drag him back up, a girl stepped on his leg. Her sharp heel broke through the skin. The pain was dull because the drug he and Solo took earlier still deadened the pain.

But the pain he did feel showed him that the effects were wearing off rapidly. His knees shook. He kept his feet with difficulty.

Neither man had any idea where they were now. They were completely lost in the rioting mass of humanity jamming the street. Their eyes felt as though hot needles were being rammed into them. Their bodies were beginning to ache with excruciating pain. It was becoming harder to keep from being knocked down and crushed.

Then they got a slight break. The mob apparently thinned out although they were too blinded to see where or why. Solo broke into a stumbling run, dragging Illya behind him.

They covered about ten feet and then Solo rammed into something hard and rigid. The smack dazed him. He started to fall and threw his arms out to grasp the obstruction. It was a corner street lamp post. He clung to it in a desperate attempt to keep from falling. His senses whirled. For an awful moment he thought he was going to lose consciousness.

Dimly he heard Illya’s anxious voice calling to him.

“I–I’m okay,” he managed to gasp. “Let’s go!”

“Go where?” Illya’s choked reply answered him.

“Anywhere!” Napoleon Solo said. “Anywhere! It will have to be better than this, even if it turns out to be the devil’s doorstep!”

They got across the sidewalk. Through their blinding tears they could see sufficiently to know that they were pressed against a store window, one of the few left unbroken by the howling mob.

They worked their way toward the door, hoping to get inside where air conditioning would clear their eyes.

Illya, who forged ahead, whispered back to his companion: “The door is barred.”

“Follow the store fronts,” Solo said.“Find an alley to get us away from this mob so we won’t be trampled if we get down on the ground. This gas rises. It should be clear right on the ground.”

Wordlessly Illya went forward with Solo stumbling behind him. Each step was becoming worse. They were both near collapse.

They stumbled up a side street. Eventually they made their way outside the area choked with the tear gas cloud.

It was still some time before they could clear their eyes. In the meantime, the energy pills lost their effect. The pills were so strong that they could not be taken more than once in a twenty-four hour period.

The waning of the pills’ effects left both men near exhaustion. The torture they had taken, first in the Mallon mansion fire and then in the Sunset Strip riots, was more than the human body could absorb and keep going.

Even so, rest was impossible. The ugly THRUSH threat was too great to permit the luxury of stopping even for a few minutes.

So as soon as they could see clearly again, Illya and Napoleon started back to the riot area. They circled the block and came in upwind to avoid the tear gas.

There was a light breeze. The slightly luminous green cloud of gas was moving slowly away.

As the two men from U.N.C.L.E. stumbled back on Sunset Boulevard, they were stunned by the magnitude of the destruction. Solo pulled out his pen communicator and called Waverly in New York.

It would be about three o’clock on the East Coast, but he had no difficulty getting through to the U.N.C.L.E. chief. Waverly’s clipped slightly British accent came through without delay. There was no sign of fatigue or sleepiness in his voice when he replied to Napoleon Solo’s call sign.

“Yes, Mr. Solo,” he said. “Go ahead.”

“We are on Sunset Boulevard, sir,” Napoleon said in a strained voice. “The street looks like a war has passed by. It is terrible. Shop windows are smashed. Cars are overturned and burned. There are injured people everywhere. I can see a fire hydrant broken and spurting water in the air. There’s a fire blazing in a building across the street. A block away a mob of

these monsters are overturning a police car. Everywhere these monsters are destroying, fighting, running wild!”

“This is terrible!” Waverly said, struggling to keep his ordinary calm. “It only bears out what I feared. If these riots continue, they could demoralize the world. I have reports that they are going on in both London and Paris right now. So they are not local.”

“This one was started by an audience leaving a showing of Mallon’s *Million Monsters* film, sir,” Solo said. “But there are more people involved than could possibly been in the theater. It probably only holds about fifteen hundred. There are at least three thousand kids involved here.”

“Possibly a lot aren’t infested by the THRUSH madness,” Waverly said. “They saw a fight and joined in.”

“Yes, sir,” Illya put in, “and many could be previously infected. Apparently this madness comes and goes.”

“However,” Waverly said, “reports from here and abroad indicate that this film is definitely connected with this riot disease. We are now running tests and we may ask the government to ban the film if we find there is a connection.”

“I’m afraid,” Solo said, “that if THRUSH has found a way to poison an audience’s mind through one film, they can– and even may be–doing it through a hundred more.”

“That is correct, Mr. Solo,” Waverly said. “Also it is possible to expand it into every type of mass communications media. I suspect that this *Million Monsters* film is a pilot or test of a new mind slavery process. If it works, and it seems to, then it will be expanded.”

“I see,” Solo said soberly. “Then we will be confronted with ten billion monsters instead of just a million!”

“And all controlled by THRUSH!” Waverly said. “You can see how desperate our situation is. You must find out what is behind this terrible menace, Mr. Solo. What about Mallon? Were you able to see him?”

“He’s dead, sir,” Napoleon said solemnly.

“Then there was a connection!”

“It would seem so. We’re trying to find it,” the man from U.N.C.L.E. said. “We’re at the riot now. We’re searching for a definite THRUSH connection.”

“Excellent, Mr. Solo,” Waverly said. “Please keep me informed, and I will pass along to you any information I receive from April Dancer in

London. Will Mr. Kuryakin still be able to keep his schedule to fly to Paris and check on this film importer who saw Mallon?”

“Yes, sir,” Illya said.

“Excellent!” Waverly said. “Carry on, gentlemen.”

Wearily Napoleon Solo pushed down the antenna to cut off the pen communicator.

“Carry on!” he said, throwing a wry grin at his companion. “Easier said than done. I never felt less like carrying on.”

“Oh, you’ll feel better after you get some rest,” Illya said.

“When will *that* be?”

“A long, long time, I’m afraid,” Kuryakin said sadly. “I—”

He stopped as a girl came running down the street, dodging her way through the riot mess. She came almost abreast of them.

“There’s something about her that looks familiar,” Illya said.

“You can bet your sweet life there is!” Solo cried. “That’s Marsha Mallon! Come on!”

But she was faster than they were. She vanished into the fighting mob ahead.

It was virtual suicide for anyone in their weakened condition to plunge into that seething mass of humanity again. But they had no choice. They went after her.

TWO

They went without question or second thought. Disregard of one's own comfort and safety was the first requirement of an U.N.C.L.E. operative.

In the center of the riot those still affected by the tear gas were stumbling, shrieking and blindly striking out at everything that came within their distance.

Men and girls were sprawled in the street. Some were bleeding, hundreds injured, but like Marsha Mallon in the airline terminal, something kept driving them on.

Napoleon and Illya paused, pressed back against a store window just outside the gas area, watching closely. They needed to know everything about the reaction of people to the strange THRUSH-induced compulsion.

"They are affected by the gas just as your knockout drops rendered Marsha Mallon unconscious," Illya observed. "But whatever is driving them will not let their bodies stop."

Solo nodded and called Waverly on the pen communicator. Minutely he described every action of the zombie-like actions of the rioters.

"Your words are being fed directly into the computers. We will have a probability in about fifteen seconds," Waverly said.

"My guess is this film, *The Million Monsters*, has some sinister hypnotic effect on its audiences," Napoleon said. "This renders them susceptible to some sort of brain wave generator that can send out impulses on the same wavelength as the human mind. When their conscious mind is dormant, they react to orders from this THRUSH brain wave transmitter."

"Is this a guess or do you have some solid evidence, Mr. Solo?"

Alexander Waverly asked.

"Call it a hunch," Solo replied.

"Hunches are for horse players," Waverly said coldly. "We must have facts–good solid facts. We are on the verge of a complete collapse of law and order that could throw the entire world back into savagery! We–"

He broke off and then said hurriedly, "Keep tuned in. The computers are coming in with a probability report."

"Yes, sir," Solo said.

“But do not depend too much on this preliminary report. It will be as accurate as our limited information will permit the computer to be. But we may not know enough yet to permit the electronic machines to give us a true picture.”

A second later the computer’s mechanical voice came over the electronic beam from New York’s U.N.C.L.E. headquarters. The most likely probability, the machine said, followed almost exactly the theory that Napoleon had outlined to his chief.

Solo heard Waverly grunt.

The computer was silent for ten seconds and then a metallic voice said as it electronically scanned the algebraic computation tapes and picked out and assembled the words from its memory banks to make its report in voice:

“The probability is that some kind of subliminal suggestion is projected to the audience of the *Million Monsters* film. This suggestion is probably too fast and high a pitch to be consciously observed by the audience, but is indelibly impressed on the subject’s subconscious mind. This is nothing new. It has been tried on TV advertising until public complaints forced its discontinuance. THRUSH has evidently refined the process to achieve a method of enslaving minds.”

When the mechanical voice shut off, Solo heard Waverly speak into a transmitter to the chief of the computer section.

“Set up a new program,” he said sharply. “I personally viewed this *Million Monsters* film myself at the film exchange screening room. It had no effect on me. Nor did it affect any of the others. I want to know why as quickly as possible. I suspect there is a definite clue there.”

“Sir, if I can intrude with another hunch–” Solo began apologetically.

“Go ahead, Mr. Solo. If you are right this time, we’ll dispense with the computer and set you up with a roll of punch tape!” Waverly said.

It was like the U.N.C.L.E. chief to speak lightly when the situation was on the brink of desperation.

“Well, sir,” Solo said, “this is based on more than just speculation. I have been watching the crowd. This subliminal suggestion power seems to only affect young people. I have an idea it may have to do with the age of the brain cells. I suspect that it would have its greatest effect upon young children and then would gradually decrease in power as the brain cells age and mature.”

“That might well explain why none of us who viewed the film came under the spell,” Waverly said. “So far as our reports have come in, everyone involved in the riots have been under thirty. You could well be right. We will need more data.”

“We’ll get it,” Solo said.

“Specifically,” Waverly went on, “we need to know how this subliminal suggestion is accomplished, how long the effects last, how THRUSH turns it off and on, and what THRUSH’s goal is.”

“I think we’re making some progress, sir,” Illya said.

“Then carry on, gentlemen–but be careful. Four of THRUSH’s most important liquidators have left Europe, April Dancer reports. It is my hunch that you two are the target. That indicates to me that you are pushing THRUSH harder than it appears to us right now.”

“Yes, sir,” Napoleon said.

“I think we–”

“Napoleon!” Illya broke in. “It’s *him!*”

“Who?”

“The news photographer who tried to take our picture in the terminal!”

“So what? This thing is news. I’d be surprised if–”

“Yeah,” Illya cut in, ‘but he hasn’t taken a single picture. He keeps pointing that camera, but never shoots. If I remember correctly, the fight went out of those zombies in the terminal when he was bowled over and his camera broken!”

“A camera would be an excellent place to disguise a transmitter,” Waverly put in.

“We’ll find out right fast!” Napoleon said grimly. He shoved down the antenna to cut the connection with U.N.C.L.E. headquarters.

“Where is he?” Napoleon asked Illya.

His companion nodded his head. “He was standing atop that overturned car a moment ago. He can’t be far. Come on!” Ahead of them the riot mob was weaving an insane dance. Then suddenly the fury went out of them. The length of the jam packed street of destruction men and girls were dropping in exhaustion. Panting, shivering, bewilderment on their faces, they sagged in their tracks, too tired to move a step. The terrible electronic will had forced terrible actions beyond their strength had released its hold upon their minds.

“There he is!” Illya cried, pointing across the street.

Solo whirled. The collapse of the riots revealed the man they sought crouched back against a brick wall almost directly opposite of them.

Napoleon saw the man duck and the blast of a gun cut above the sobbing gasps and moans of the suffering rioters. The glass window just opposite of the wall shattered as the bullet plowed into it.

“It’s the girl!” Illya gasped. “Marsha Mallon! She’s trying to kill him!”

Then Napoleon saw her. She was leaning around the corner of the building. The coat she was wearing was partly fallen open. Underneath he could see a polka dotted bikini.

She fire again. The photographer was knocked back as her bullet smashed into his leg. He twisted as he fell, apparently seeking desperately to keep his camera from being smashed in the fall.

The girl stepped back from the partial protection of the brick corner. She raised her gun to get a better shot at the fallen man. It was not a case of protecting herself. She was out to commit murder!

Solo jerked up his U.N.C.L.E. Special, snapping the double cartridge cylinder to insure the stunning pellets were in place instead of the steel jacketed bullets. They would render her unconscious without any ill after-effects. He had a double motive in knocking the girl out: to prevent her from murdering the photographer and to save the man for questioning under the powerful U.N.C.L.E. truth serum.

But before he could shoot, Illya called frantically: “Quick, Napoleon! There, behind her!”

Kuryakin, who had lost his own gun in the fire, pointed to two men coming up fast behind the girl. One had the oddly shaped THRUSH gun in his hand.

Napoleon and the THRUSH agent fired at the same time.

The agent collapsed with a strangled cry.

Intent upon the second man from THRUSH, Solo did not see what happened to the girl.

The second killer dodged back around the corner. Solo shouted back over his shoulder to Kuryakin, “Get that photographer, Illya! I’ll try to take care of the other one!”

He started across the street, his way impeded by the fallen rioters. Kuryakin headed for the photographer, who was writhing in agony on the pavement.

But before he could reach him, a third man opened fire from across the street. Kuryakin ducked, falling flat on the pavement between two dead girls, killed when they fell in the crushing mob and were trampled.

Solo caught his frantic movement and whirled to see what the danger was. As he did a bullet whined past his head, shot from the gun of the man he had been pursuing.

Caught in the crossfire between two Thrush agents, Solo ducked behind an overturned car. Partially protected, he aimed through the broken windshield, firing first at the left side of the street and then at the right.

He shot rapidly, exhausting his ammunition to provide cover for Kuryakin. If he could keep the killer's attention riveted on him, then the more exposed Kuryakin would have a chance to get better cover.

Illya, under the cover of the rapid exchange of gunfire, got to his feet. His legs shook from fatigue. He stumbled and fell. Grimly he forced himself to get back up, although every muscle in his body screamed for rest.

Only his iron will kept him from falling. He got across the street. His legs were shaking as if he had run five miles. Illya Kuryakin's throat was raw from his gasping breath.

He glanced back. Napoleon and the two THRUSH agents were still blasting away at each other. In the distance three police sirens were screaming as reinforcements poured into the area.

They were too far away to be of any help to the men from U.N.C.L.E. and the street was too much of a shambles to permit any fast action by anyone. They could expect no help. As so often happened in their dangerous work, the only persons Illya and Napoleon could depend on were themselves.

As Kuryakin closed in on the suspected photographer, the man snaked his body around. He jerked up the camera. Illya tried to duck, but his exhausted legs wouldn't support the sudden movement. He fell.

The photographer swung the camera in a murderous blow at Illya's head. Kuryakin threw his head back and took the blow on the shoulder. The camera burst open. Illya caught a momentary glimpse of the interior. It wasn't the usual black box.

He saw a flash of complicated wiring and transistors.

He hurled himself at the THRUSH man. His shoulder was numb and his legs refused to support him. But he snaked his body around and grabbed the

photographer’s arm. He threw all his dwindling strength on it, attempting to wrench the man’s limb back in an imprisoning grasp.

The man jerked back and then lunged forward, driving his head into Illya’s stomach. The man from U.N.C.L.E. was knocked back. His head struck the pavement. He gave a choking cry.

THREE

Napoleon Solo saw his companion fall. But he was powerless to come to his aid. The two THRUSH killers had him in a cross fire. He raised his head, looking for a target. A THRUSH bullet smashed into the car and ricocheted up the street with a murderous whine.

Ducking as low as possible, Napoleon pulled out his pen communicator. He extended the antenna and called New York.

“Mr. Waverly? An emergency! Can you transmit a call to the Los Angeles sheriff’s office. They have men surrounding the area doing the best they can, but we need their help. The photographer is getting away. Can you ask the patrols to look out for him?”

“What is the description?” Waverly’s voice came back.

“About Kuryakin’s height. His hair is black and his chin so narrow that his face appears wedge-shaped. Light summer suit of an olive plaid.”

“The call will go out,” Waverly said. “And you? Isn’t that a gunshot I hear in the distance?”

“Yes, sir. A slight detail to take care of. If you’ll excuse me, sir. I’m busy!”

Slamming down the pen communicator antenna, Napoleon Solo checked his weapon. His ammunition was dangerously low. There were three shots left. He was sure that his adversaries were in equally bad shape.

Their firing had tapered off. He suspected they were holding their shots, husbanding their ammunition and waiting for him to present a target.

“Give them what they want!” he said grimly.

He snaked his body forward. He half raised up, still protected from their sight by the body of the overturned car. From this vantage point he reached up with the barrel of the U.N.C.L.E. gun and gave the upturned front wheel a spin.

Instantly there was a crash of gunfire as the two THRUSH liquidators caught the movement and started shooting in nervous haste.

Solo caught a glimpse of the one across the street as he leaned around the corner of the building to shoot. He squeezed off the Special’s trigger. The shot caught the THRUSH man full in the chest. Solo whirled to face his second adversary.

He waited, full in the open now, presenting himself as a target to draw out the other. There was a long ten-second wait. At least it seemed long to Napoleon. He slipped the gun cylinder back to the knockout pellets.

Still there was no sight of the man. Solo started cautiously forward, wondering if the THRUSH liquidator had fled. But as he stepped up on the sidewalk, Napoleon caught a sudden movement to the left. He whirled and fired. The THRUSH agent pitched forward.

Solo took a second to assure himself that the man was unconscious. Then he propped the THRUSH man against the wall where he would not be trampled as the bewildering rioters started moving again.

This done, he hurried across the street to see after Illya. Kuryakin was sitting with his back against a store front. His temple was bloody from the savage blow he had taken when his head hit the pavement.

“Okay?” Solo asked anxiously.

“Don’t bother to put the pieces back together!” Kuryakin said with a strained attempt to grin. “I’m broken in so many pieces it’s not worth the glue to repair me!”

“I’ll get the police car to run you down to the hospital.”

“You go for me,” Illya said weakly but with a stubborn thrust of his jaw. “I got business to tend to. Like, say a photographer with a camera that isn’t a camera at all!”

“What is it then?” Napoleon asked.

“Sit down here beside me,” Illya said. “I’m not equal to standing up yet and you look like you’re about to fall.”

“For once in your life you’re right,” Solo said. He stiffly lowered himself down beside his friend.

“This has been one hell of a night,” he said.

“And it is still a long way to morning,” Illya said. “Man! How my head clangs. I feel like there are a couple of giants in there with sledge hammers pounding away for all they are worth.”

“Are you sure–?”

Solo began, giving his companion a worried look.

“I’m sure!” Illya snapped. “I have no objection to going to a hospital, provided the nurses are pretty–just as soon as this case is in the file. But not one second sooner!”

Solo knew that it was useless to argue. Illya Kuryakin was a man who hated above everything else to fail. And his manner showed definitely that

he felt that he had failed now. He did not view their lack of success in capturing the “photographer” as just a temporary setback, as Solo did. To him it was a failure and it rubbed his temper raw.

“Okay,” Napoleon said. “What about this peculiar cameraman? To save time, I’ll ring Mr. Waverly in on the report.”

After Solo extended the pen communicator antenna, Kuryakin said, “When he hit me with the camera, it broke open. The inside of the box was a jumble of electronic circuits. The lens was actually a concentrating transmitter antenna. There is no doubt that it is a portable transmitter for emitting some kind of signal which definitely influences the minds of people who have seen *The Million Monsters* film.”

“It fits in very well with the probability given us by the computer,” Waverly said.

“Then this is the situation as we understand it right now,” Napoleon said. “THRUSH has tainted a motion picture called *The Million Monsters* with subliminal suggestion forces which have the power of impressing themselves on young people from the cradle to about thirty. The producer, Fred B. Mallon, learned what had happened to his film, and knowing he was watched, sent you an anonymous note of warning. “Then he was murdered for his trouble. His daughter, a lovely but intellectual miss, evidently is under the influence of this subliminal suggestion force. We saw her leave her father’s house just before he was killed. If she is under THRUSH control, she could have done it herself.”

“She was definitely under control when she attacked us in the air terminal,” Illya put in. “But she was not tonight, for she tried to murder the ‘cameraman’ “

“That is very odd,” Waverly said. “But can we be sure now that this ‘cameraman’ was actually the ‘monster master.’ These subconscious suggestions received from the film apparently lay dormant until excited by this exciter transmitter.”

“At least we are making progress,” Solo said. “The next thing is to try and get our hands on a wave transmitter. Once we know how it affects these rioters minds, then we can forge some sort of counter-measure.”

“I agree,” Mr. Alexander Waverly said. “I am certain that the outbreaks here and in Europe are just tests. This matter of portable wave machines is too crude. I have a horrible vision of these waves being sent out by huge

transmitters bouncing their broadcast off Telstar communications satellite to blanket the world!”

“I believe, sir,” Napoleon said, “That half the world’s population is under thirty years of age.”

“That is correct, Mr. Solo,” Waverly said. Despite an effort to maintain his characteristic calm, the U.N.C.L.E. chief’s voice was not quite as steady as usual. “Can you imagine what will happen if half the world’s population becomes THRUSH’s slaves?”

Napoleon looked out across the devastation on Sunset Boulevard. He shuddered.

“That will never happen, sir!” he said. “We’ll find some way to stop this monstrous plot against humanity.”

“Are there any leads?” Waverly asked.

“I hope so,” Napoleon said. “I hit one of the ‘liquidators’ with a pellet. He is still unconscious. When he comes to, I’ll interrogate him under truth serum. If he knows anything, I’ll get it out of him.”

“Liquidators?” Waverly repeated. “Then they did catch up with you. There were four.”

“Two you can scratch from the list,” Napoleon said quietly. “One I have. The other probably helped the ‘monster master’ to get away. He was shot. I don’t know how badly.”

“I see,” Waverly said. “Two to one odds. Very good, Mr. Solo. But there will be others, you know. This is just the beginning. From now on your lives will be a paramount THRUSH target.”

“That’s right, sir,” Napoleon said grimly. “But do not forget that *they* are *my* target too! And I don’t usually miss.”

“Oh, I’ll never forget that!” Waverly said. “Never! And now what about Mr. Kuryakin? I noticed quite a strain in his voice. And I also noticed that he hasn’t jumped in with his usual interruptions. Is he–?”

“Never felt better!” Illya said quickly. “Hear that pitter-patter of feet? That is me running the hundred yard dash down Sunset to show how lively I am!”

“Hmmm!” Waverly said. “Anyway, will you keep your schedule and check on that Parisian film importer?”

“Yes, sir!” Illya said without hesitation.

“Very well,” Waverly said. “Gentlemen, thank you. We have made some progress. Please keep me informed.”

“Can you walk?” Solo asked his companion after closing the antenna to break the connection with U.N.C.L.E. headquarters.

“No,” Illya said, struggling groggily to his feet. “But I sure can totter.”

“Well, I’ve got to get this THRUSH liquidator out of sight before the police work their way down this far,” Napoleon said.

Kuryakin nodded. He understood the urgency. The police, under Supreme Court decisions, could not question a suspect without his lawyer being present. Such niceties had to be put aside when the fate of civilization depended upon the outcome. The charge of U.N.C.L.E. truth serum in its secret receptacle inside Napoleon Solo’s ring packed a power that no person could resist.

“Where are you going to take him?” Illya asked.

“For a ride,” Solo said. “If you’ll give me a hand, we’ll drag him back in the alley where the police will miss him. I’ll find a phone and call one of the U-drive car agencies to send me down a vehicle. Then I’ll drop you at the airport and find a nice secluded spot somewhere.”

“And then–” Illya asked.

“Oh, then we’ll talk a while,” Solo said, glancing grimly at the prisoner.

ACT IV
THE MONSTER MAKERS

Illya Kuryakin closed his eyes when he took his seat on the jet to Europe. He did not open them again until the stewardess shook him on their arrival in France.

He got up, still stiff and beaten from the punishment his body had taken. A small bandage covered the cut on his head and he walked with a slight limp.

The first thing that caught his eye at the airport was a copy of the Paris edition of the *New York Times.* Splashed across page one was a photograph of rioting teenagers. Except for the Montmarte background, the scene reminded him of the Sunset Strip fury.

On the drive into the city he carefully read the story. There was no mention of the *Million Monsters* film. A French police official from the *Surete* insisted that the madness was caused by a new type of drug–quite possibly of the LSD family.

Turning on to the amusement schedule, Illya noted, however that the film was screening in Paris. One of the theaters was just off the Place

Pigalle, not far from the Moulin Rouge. The riot occurred only a short distance away.

Making a sudden decision, he decided to pass up his reservation at the sumptuous Champs Elysees tourist hotel. Instead he told the driver to find him a place near Pigalle.

The driver grinned and said, *Oui, oui!"*

Leaning back and closing his still weary eyes, Illya thought: "I wish you were right, buddy."

After checking into a small hotel, Illya put through a call to the offices of the French film exchange that handle Mallon's films in Europe. A voice as heady as French wine asked his business. When he asked for Monsieur Maurice Leroux the wine turned chill. It was still polite, but there was an oddly apprehensive note that made Illya's Slavic face screw up thoughtfully.

"I am so sorry," the girl's voice said. "But Monsieur Leroux he has not returned from the trip to Hollywood."

"I see," Illya said. "That is most unfortunate. When will Monsieur Leroux return?"

She hesitated. Then said, "Perhaps not for a week."

"But I saw him in Hollywood only yesterday. He said he was returning at once."

There was a dead silence, indicating that she had placed her hand over the mouthpiece to consult with someone else.

Illya quickly extracted what appeared to be a cigarette lighter from his pocket. He touched the base of the sub-miniature tape recorder built into the lighter. Able to pick up vibrations a hundred thousand times too faint for human ears, he hoped that it would be able to record what she said through the cover of her hand on the mouthpiece.

The girl's voice came back clearly as she removed her hand. "I have a note here which I regretfully overlooked. Monsieur Leroux called this morning from Hollywood. He has extended his stay for three more days."

"Oh!" Illya said, knowing that Leroux had left the United States, for he checked the plane manifest before leaving Los Angeles himself. "Mr. Leroux called this morning?"

"Oui, m'sieur," she said in her honey-wine voice. "I took the call myself. I recall now."

“Then there is nothing else for me to do but wait for him,” Illya said. “I notice that it is near office closing time in Paris. Perhaps you and I could–”

“I am so sorry, m’sieur, but I–”

“It isn’t as if we were strangers, mademoiselle,” Illya said quickly. He pulled a name out of the air. “I am Frank Hudson of the Fred B. Mallon productions in Hollywood. You remember Monsieur Leroux introducing us when I was in Paris before.”

“Oh, yes, of course, Monsieur Hudson,” she said quickly. “I could not forget so handsome a man!”

“Then if you have an engagement for the evening, perhaps there is time for a before dinner cocktail?”

“Well–” she began doubtfully and then changed her tune abruptly. “But, yes! I must run home to freshen up a bit first. My apartment is in Montmarte.”

She gave him an address on the Rue de Clichy, not too far from where he was calling. “You may call for me at eight-fifteen,” she said.

After he replaced the phone, Illya stood for a moment staring thoughtfully at it. His first thought was that 8:15 was rather late for a cocktail. His second thought was that she had carefully arranged the time to coincide with darkness in Paris at this time of year. Also it was extremely suspicious how quickly she recognized the non-existent Frank Hudson.

Leaning back on the bed to rest his wearied bones as much as possible, he re-cycled the sub-miniature tape recorder. The adjusting the volume gain, he replayed the area where she had her hand over the phone mouthpiece.

He heard the girl’s voice say quickly, “It is Illya Kuryakin!”

Another voice, a man’s, asked suspiciously, “Who is Kuryakin?”

“One of the men from U.N.C.L.E.!” the girl replied breathlessly.

“How did U.N.C.L.E.–Oh, this is terrible. I’m sorry we ever got mixed up in this mess. What–”

“Call LeBlanc! He is our THRUSH contact here. I’ll get Kuryakin to Montmarte. Tell him I’ll do the rest!”

Illya switched off the machine. He closed his eyes with a grin.

“She’ll do the rest?” he said. “I wonder if ‘the rest’ is what she thinks it is!”

He took out his pen communicator and put through an emergency connection to U.N.C.L.E. headquarters in New York. His secret coded call

brought him directly to the organization's information files.

"Do we have any information on a Parisian named LeBlanc in connection with THRUSH?" he asked. "And I also want everything I can get on the receptionist in Maurice Leroux's International Film Exchange in Paris."

"Stand by," the chief librarian said. "It will take the computers ten seconds to research the files."

The seconds ticked away and then the voice converter on the computers started to read off the punched card data: "LeBlanc–no given name known–is a professional assassin who works all over Europe. There is no description of him, for he has never been arrested. He is extremely efficient and works with an exceedingly lovely woman. This woman is an artist in changing her appearance. She also has no known description."

"Is he connected with THRUSH?" Illya asked.

"We think so, but not enough is known of him to be sure. He is exceedingly clever."

"Well, mark him down now as a sure THRUSH employee. And as for his girl accomplice, add to her description that she has a voice that sparkles like fine wine."

There was a short silence at the end of the connection while the U.N.C.L.E. information office searched its computers for other data of importance.

"Now for your other question about Leroux's receptionist," the chief librarian said. "There is no file on any employee of the International Film Exchange. Your request has been referred to our Paris contact. Please switch communicator to Channel F-403. You will receive your answer direct."

Kuryakin adjusted a tiny dial inside the pen cap. There was a fifteen-second wait. Then the miniature speaker went into action again:

"The receptionist at International Film Exchange is named Fifi Montaigne. She was injured by someone who broke into her apartment last night. She is in Boulogne Hospital. She is near death and no one is permitted to see her."

"Who took her place with the company this afternoon?" Illya asked.

"No one," the report replied. "The office has been closed."

"Can you get someone from the telephone office to make a routine check? I want to know if someone was in that office. If not, then how its

phone was answered a few minutes ago."

"It can be arranged. T will take about an hour. We have to clear all our operations with the police."

Kuryakin looked at his watch. It was close to six and he had over two hours before his date with the fake receptionist.

"Go ahead. Call me here on the pen communicator. Do not use the telephone."

The call was delayed. Kuryakin slept another two hours and then got up to keep his date with the fake receptionist. He was just going out the door when a tiny electric shock from the pen announced a call.

"The office is empty," the report said. "We found that the telephone wire had been tapped and an extension run to a transmission box hidden in the wall. When the box is activated, all calls to the phone are automatically switched by radio communication. There is no way to trace where the call goes, since anyone who knew the wavelength could listen in."

"Very well," Illya said. "Pass this information on to Waverly in New York."

"There is something else of utmost importance," the reporter from the Paris office said.

"I'm late," Kuryakin said impatiently. "Can you give it to me after I come back?"

"This is so important it may have a bearing on your actions," the voice said. "There was a body in the film exchange office. It was jammed into a closet in the back storage room where the film reels are kept."

"Go on!" Illya said in a dull voice, knowing without asking whom the corpse would prove to be.

"It was the body of Maurice Leroux."

"Do the police know yet?" Illya asked.

"No, but we must notify them at once."

"Hold off for fifteen minutes," Illya said. And then try and get the police to withhold a public announcement for another hour.'

Kuryakin left the hotel in a run. Ten minutes later he was across the street from the address the girl had given him. Suspecting a trap, he did not go to the second floor apartment himself. He hailed a passing cab and gave the driver a large franc note to go get the girl.

Kuryakin went across the street to a sidewalk cafe. He stood with his back against a wall and his hand only inches from the shoulder holstered

U.N.C.L.E. Special.

A light rain was starting to fall, but he did not take cover. He kept watching the front of the building for any evidence that someone was following the cab driver.

Certain now that if there was a trap, it was upstairs, Illya rapidly crossed the street. He entered the small foyer and looked cautiously back before climbing the narrow flight of stairs. He was halfway up when the cab driver came racing down. In the dim light he could see the frightened twist of the man's face. He brushed against Illya as he went down the steps, but apparently was too scared to recognize his fare.

Kuryakin went up the stairs in a dead run, his U.N.C.L.E. Special in his hand. The door to the first apartment was open. He could see a mass of blonde hair on the rug. It was blood-stained!

He stepped to the door, looking cautiously about. The dead girl's legs were drawn up as if she died in acute agony. Her face was frozen by death in a mask of terror.

Illya could see the hilt of a knife protruding from her left side. It was curiously carved.

After a quick glance at the corpse, Illya looked about the room. It was typically middle class with slightly shabby furniture.

A bedroom led off the sitting room. Illya assured himself that no one was hiding there. He looked down at the girl.

"Crazy mixed up kid, he said. "She was going to take care of a trap for me, but walked into one herself."

He stared down at the dead girl, feeling a distinct uneasiness. Somehow the girl's death was a jarring note. It was obvious from what he heard through the amplifier that this dead woman had been a member of THRUSH. "Then who killed her?" Kuryakin asked himself, "and why? It just doesn't fit."

He picked up a phone and called the police. The homicide inspector who arrived quickly was exactly the opposite the picture one gets of the French police after reading Maigret. Inspector Gabin had the build of an Abraham Lincoln and the face of a hanging judge.

He gave a noncommittal grunt when Illya showed his U.N.C.L.E. credentials. After that he ignored Kuryakin until he made a careful turn about the room. Then he stood for a long moment looking down at the dead woman's face.

Suddenly he cut a sharp glance over at Illya Kuryakin.

“Who is she?” he asked.

“She claimed to be a receptionist for International Film.”

The inspector’s sour face turned more morose. “Mr. Kuryakin! I wish to cooperate with U.N.C.L.E., but I also demand that U.N.C.L.E. cooperate with me! Before you continue your evasive lies, let me say that I recognize this woman. She is a professional undercover agent who has lately been working for your U.N.C.L.E. associates here in Paris!”

“I just arrived,” Illya said. “I didn’t know. I mistook her for the woman I came here to meet. Apparently this agent was also on the woman’s trail. She got too warm and was killed.”

He gave the Frenchman a quick sketch of the case he was working on.

Before the inspector could comment, the medical examiner bustled into the room. As he bent over the girl to begin his examination, her body exploded!

Illya threw himself flat on the floor. A twisted piece of shrapnel cut the shoulder of his jacket. The inspector was knocked down, bleeding from a wound in his throat. The doctor was killed instantly. There was a large gaping hole in the corpse where the booby trap exploded.

Two members of the police team who had been inspecting the bedroom rushed in.

Be careful!” Illya warned them. “There may be another booby trap implanted in the corpse.”

Waving the two policemen back into the bedroom, he followed them. There he grabbed a pillow from the bed and threw it at the dead woman.

There was a flash of fire and feathers exploded outwardly to fill the room like a snowstorm.

“It looks like there was a photo-electric cell set with the bomb to explode it when the direct level of light was cut off,” Illya said.

“What a devilish trap!” one of the policemen gasped.

“And it was meant for me!” Illya thought.

TWO

Back in Hollywood, after Napoleon Solo dropped Kuryakin at the airport, he drove to the back of the public parking lot. He waited impatiently for the effects of the knockout drops to wear off his prisoner. Then he inoculated the THRUSH man with truth serum from the tiny reservoir in his U.N.C.L.E. finger ring.

While he waited for the drug to take effect, Solo opened his pen communicator circuit with Waverly in New York so the U.N.C.L.E. chief could listen to the interrogation.

In work so hazardous as this, anything might happen to him and he wanted Waverly to have the information so his replacement would not be handicapped if he was killed.

Solo's first question verified his theory of the case. Subliminal hypnosis was being accomplished by the Mallon *Million Monsters* film. Control, the prisoner revealed, was done by radio suggestion.

"Is it possible to give individual commands?"

Napoleon Solo asked.

"No," the prisoner replied in a dreamy voice. "They can only give mass suggestion."

"Like, say 'destroy everything in sight?' "

"Yes," the prisoner said.

"What is THRUSH's objective?"

"The subliminal effects are only effective up to about the age of twenty-four. From twenty-four to thirty it may or may not work. After thirty the brain cells are sufficiently set that no impression is possible. THRUSH intends to use the twenty-four and under age group to destroy every living person over thirty."

"Then the rest will be enslaved by THRUSH?" Napoleon asked.

"Yes," his prisoner said.

"What happens when these mind slaves grow older?" he asked. "Will their minds lose the subliminally induced hypnosis?"

"Yes."

"What will THRUSH do about that?"

"They will be destroyed between the ages of twenty-four and thirty."

“Did you hear that Mr. Waverly?” Napoleon asked.

“Yes,” Alexander Waverly answered back.

“This is the most monstrous scheme THRUSH has ever devised! It condemns every person on earth to death or slavery. And even the slaves will be cut down in the best years of their lives!”

“The present riots are just tests, aren’t they?” Solo asked.

“Yes,” his prisoner replied.

“When will the full scale attack be made?”

“As soon as the transmitters can be finished. In about four days.”

“This is terrible!” Waverly said. “Will other media besides motion pictures be used?”

“Yes–radio, TV and everywhere people gather in large crowds.”

“How can they do that?” Solo asked.

“Subliminal broadcasters, portable units, will be taken into sporting events–football, baseball, hockey, basketball–shows, carnivals, and even churches.”

“Four days!” Solo said in a stricken voice. “That doesn’t leave us much time.”

“But we’ll do it,” Waverly said sharply.

“Where is the seat of this thing?” Solo asked.

“Here in Hollywood,” the prisoner replied. “I don’t know where. We are met, blindfolded and led in to our meetings.”

“What did Mallon have to do with this?”

“His daughter is a scientist. She developed the process. Her father saw it as a means of subliminally persuading audiences to come back and see his pictures.”

“Then THRUSH got wind of it and saw it as a means of controlling the world?”

“Yes.”

“Mallon must have realized what was happening and tried to warn you with that anonymous tip about himself,” Solo said to Waverly.

“It would seem so,” Waverly said. “I don’t quite understand about the girl, Marsha Mallon. She attacked you and Kuryakin while under the influence of the monster-making process, but then she seemed untouched by it during the Sunset Strip riot.”

“She is twenty-six, in the age bracket where the subliminal hypnosis works erratically,” the prisoner replied under stimulus of the truth serum.

“How did she become inoculated with the hypnotic suggestion in the first place?“Solo asked.

“She was tricked into it. Griffis, our field director, thought he could use her to murder her father. At times she can be controlled and at other times she breaks loose from the hypnosis.”

“This Griffis sent her to murder Kuryakin and me at the airport?”

“Yes.”

“Did she murder her father?”

“No.”

“Who did it?”

“Members of the THRUSH liquidation team. They were supposed to kill her also but she got away. She has a higher destroy number on the THRUSH liquidation list than either Solo or Kuryakin.”

“We’ll have to stop now, sir,” Solo said into the pen communicator to Waverly. “You know the truth serum’s effects. He must rest.”

“Yes, of course.” Waverly replied. “Forget him now. Find that girl! She is the key to this entire mess.”

“Yes sir,” Napoleon said. “What are you going to do with the prisoner?”

“I have some very definite plans for him, sir,” Napoleon replied, his jaw setting in a grim line.

“Just what are you going to do?” Waverly asked, a note of suspicion creeping into his voice.

“Do, sir?” Solo inquired. “I’ll do whatever is necessary. Good-by.”

He snapped the down the antenna to cut off the circuit.

The prisoner sprawled back in his seat. His eyes closed and he went into the temporary torpor that was characteristic of the last phase of the truth serum.

Solo took this opportunity to slip a pocket tape recorder out of his jacket. It was the twin of the one used by Kuryakin in Paris.

He flipped the control dial to transmit, but did not start the reels. He switched on the tiny battery and then shoved the operating recorder under the car seat.

Then, while closely watching his prisoner’s eyes, Solo extended the antenna of his pen communicator. A faint beep came from the speaker as the set picked up transmissions from the hidden recorder. Satisfied, Napoleon shoved the pen back in his pocket.

Now he put the key back in the car ignition and waited for the prisoner to make the next move.

It took about five minutes for the torpor to wear off. After this the subject would feel no ill effects from the truth serum. The minutes ticked away. Solo could tell from the way the prisoner's breathing changed that the paralysis induced by the drug had passed.

It seemed to Solo that the man's eyes were still closed. But it was dark in the car and he suspected the prisoner was watching him through partially closed lids.

Solo took a deep breath and braced himself for the coming ordeal. He casually put one hand on the door handle and reached for the car key with the other. He fumbled it. The key dropped to the floor. He bent over as if to pick it up.

The prisoner exploded into action. He swung a hard blow to Solo's bowed head. Napoleon took the blow on the cheek. Even though he took it ducking back to soften the force, it jarred him badly. But he still kept enough of his faculties to carry through the next part of the carefully laid plan. In ducking back, he threw the full weight of his body on the door handle. When the door swung open, he tumbled out. He broke his fall as an acrobat would with his hands. He rolled back under the car in the adjoining parking spot.

Before he could get up, the prisoner had started the car and was burning rubber in a fast getaway.

Napoleon Solo got shakily to his feet. He had a flash of fear that he had made a mistake. But he put the idea aside. Permitting the prisoner to escape was admittedly a desperate move. It might even be a disastrous one, but it promised the quickest results–provided Solo could keep alive.

Napoleon's head rang. He had taken a harder blow than he expected. He hobbled as swiftly as possible across the parking lot to a U-Drive stand. His U.N.C.L.E. identification got him prompt service. Five minutes later he was wheeling out of the airport, heading toward Hollywood.

The pen communicator was open on the seat beside him. Telltale bleeps from the recorder hidden in the fugitive's car came in clearly. Then they suddenly dropped in intensity, telling Solo that the man had turned to right angles to his pursuer. Then the sounds picked up volume again and became louder. This indicated that the THRUSH man was turning back, doubling to throw off possible pursuit.

The sounds indicated so many turns that Solo gave up and parked. After about ten minutes the fugitive passed him. Napoleon did not try to follow until the other car was five minutes down the street. He didn't need to hurry. The transmitted signals from the recorder would guide him easily.

The trail led him toward the coast and then circled back through Culver City. They passed MGM Studios. Through the heavy mesh fence, Solo could see the stark cardboard outlines of a typical western town set on the studio back lot.

Solo drove on, following the telltale bleep. He kept watching behind for a possible shadow of his own. He saw nothing. The sounds from the escapee's car increased in volume as Solo passed the main gate of the Mallon Productions Studio and then dropped as Napoleon went past.

Solo drove on, sure now that the car had turned into the dark studio. The wrought iron gates were closed. Behind them Napoleon could see the shadowy figure of a guard.

As he passed, Solo noted the side streets, looking for the best vantage point from which he could observe the studio. He picked a narrow, winding thoroughfare that ascended a low hill topped by a small park. Here he figured he would not be seen from below.

He did not dare risk turning into the street that close to the studio. He had no way of knowing how well it was under observation. But he was sure that if THRUSH was using the studio, they had taken all precautions against being surprised.

So he drove on. He had to go about a mile before he wound back through a subdivision and came in on the park from the rear.

As he came down the winding road past a children's playground, he saw a car parked by the side of the road. As his lights swept across it he glimpsed a girl's head suddenly duck out of sight.

Solo turned sharply at a side road and circled away. He parked out of sight in front of some houses across from the park. He climbed out and started back on foot.

As he moved cautiously, keeping close to a thick hedge of oleanders, he drew his U.N.C.L.E. Special, shoving the cartridge carrier over to the paralyzing pellets.

He told himself grimly. "She is alone in that car. No woman would sit out here in the dark alone without a very good reason."

He came close enough to see the car. He stopped, watching closely. While the screening bushes cut his own view, he was certain that from the car's position the girl could get a clear view of the Mallon studio below. He moved closer, more certain than ever that the girl was the missing Marsha Mallon.

Cautiously Napoleon pushed his way closer. He held the gun ready to fire. Marsha had shown during the Sunset Strip riots that she intended to play a lone hand. Much as he regretted the necessity of knocking her unconscious with the pellets, Solo knew it was the only way he could control her.

After that a dose of the super-powerful U.N.C.L.E. truth serum would provide answers for some of the missing pieces of the *Million Monsters* jigsaw puzzle.

He still was not close enough to tell for sure if she was the dead producer's daughter. He crouched nearly double and quickly crossed an open area. Here he stopped, cautiously waiting to see if she had seen the movement.

She kept staring down the hill. In the dark Solo could not make out what she had in her hand, but from the shape he suspected that it was an infra-red scope for picking out objects in the dark.

As Solo moved in closer, the girl suddenly dropped the scope. She slid out of the car. He saw her crouch almost double and disappear into the darkness.

Napoleon Solo stopped, wondering uneasily what had frightened her. He waited a full minute and then started forward. He took a couple of steps and halted again when he heard a soft snap. He turned, his U.N.C.L.E. Special switched from pellets back to bullets.

Before he could fire he glimpsed a flash of light in the darkness. Then something sharp slammed into his leg.

A rapidly spreading numbness shot up from the wound. He tried to shoot, but the gun dropped from his paralyzed hand. He crumpled. In the last few seconds of lucidity left to him, he realized what had happened. THRUSH had been moving in on Marsha Mallon and he had walked straight into their trap.

His last conscious recollection was of two men standing over him. Then he heard the soft *twang!* the THRUSH gun gives when it fires its own brand of paralyzing pellets.

Then a man’s voice said in great excitement: “I think I got her! We’ve got Marsha Mallon too! Both of them!”

THREE

Following the blast in the Paris apartment Illya Kuryakin spent two hours at police headquarters. A dragnet was put out for the woman who answered Kuryakin's call to the International Film Exchange. However, the inspector on the case told Illya that he doubted they would find her.

"There is not a single clue," he said hopelessly.

"There is her voice," Illya said. "I'd recognize it. It sounded like honeyed wine."

"There are thousands of women who speak so in Paris, monsieur!" the inspector said. "It would be pleasant to go about the city asking each lovely lady one encounters to speak a few words. But I doubt that this is practical."

"I suppose not," Illya said. "But we face an increasingly desperate situation."

"Unfortunately," the inspector said, "we forwarded a report of your claim about THRUSH activity spurring these riots to the commissioners. They considered it fantastic."

"We have definite proof, Inspector," Illya said. "This is the forerunner of an attempt to destroy world civil governments."

The inspector shrugged. "I know the reputation of U.N.C.L.E.," he said. "But we are convinced that our local disturbances are purely spontaneous. In America perhaps your teenagers need stimulus to riot. In Paris it has become a way of life."

"Then I can expect no help from you," Illya said.

"We are vitally concerned with these three murders, that of the film exchange man, the U.N.C.L.E. informant, and our own Inspector Gabin. If any information of value to you comes from the investigation, we will of course cooperate with U.N.C.L.E. fully."

When Illya reported his conversation back to Waverly, the U.N.C.L.E. chief said, "I can understand the French police's skepticism, Mr. Kuryakin. It is fantastic. Unfortunately it happens to be true. Also, I must warn you to be doubly careful. I understand that THRUSH has given this professional assassin, LeBlanc, a contract. I do not know that this highly efficient criminal is aiming at you. But it is a distinct possibility."

"My only lead is this woman's voice," Illya said. "It is a thin trail."

“But keep after it, Mr. Kuryakin,’ Waverly said. “We can afford to overlook no possibility. We are in trouble everywhere. You know how thin our Hollywood lead is. Miss Dancer is having the same trouble in London. I–

“One moment, please. A report is coming in. Perhaps–”

Illya waited impatiently for a full minute. The Waverly’s voice came back through the pen communicator.

“Mr. Kuryakin!” Waverly said, obviously struggling to keep his voice calm. “You must return to Hollywood immediately! Mr. Solo has disappeared. His rented car was found on a hill overlooking the Mallon studios. There were definite signs of a struggle. In addition, police found another car registered to Marsha Mallon. It appears both have been taken by THRUSH.”

“I’ll take the next plane,” Illya said.

“Do so,” Waverly said. “While you may turn up important leads in Paris, I am convinced that the heart of this terrible matter is located in Hollywood. It is here where the subliminal evil influencers are placed in the movie soundtracks. We cannot afford to let up our pressure there. We are spread so thin that we have no one else to cover for Solo in Hollywood.”

Immediately after notifying Inspector Moreau of the French police that he was returning to the States, Illya took a cab to the airport. The magic U.N.C.L.E. name got him a place on a plane scheduled to leave in half an hour.

While waiting he caught sight of an extraordinarily lovely girl. Her lovely figure and chic traveling suit were the epitome of French flair and style. She was standing by the plate glass window looking out into the night.

When Kuryakin stopped to look at her, it was the natural reaction of a young man for a lovely girl. But his second look was the natural reaction of a cold-blooded man who keeps alive in a dangerous profession by carefully noting every small detail.

It seemed to him that she could see little outside in the dark, but that her position made the glass a natural mirror in which she could observe what went on behind her.

And there was no one behind her but himself. Thoughtfully Illya went on. He stopped for a second at a magazine kiosk to have an excuse for

looking at her again. She had shifted so that she could still observe him in the reflected glass.

For a second Illya debated his next move. His first impulse was to go over and make some excuse for speaking to her. He was certain that he would recognize the honey-wine voice he heard on the phone if he could hear the girl speak again.

On second thought he decided this too abrupt an approach. Obviously this girl in the air terminal had a more than passing interest in him. If she were the woman he sought, it would be better to have additional information before he accosted her.

He went over to the airline service counter and found the smiling young lady who had previously checked him in.

“The lady across the lobby–” he said.

“You can do better than that, Mr. Kuryakin,” she said, and her smile left no doubt of whom she meant he could do better with.

Regretfully he put aside the idea.

“No doubt about it,” he said. “But there is the matter of a plane leaving in a few minutes. You aren’t going on it, are you?”

“No, I’m not, Mr. Kuryakin,” she said, shrugging.

“How did you know my name?” he asked.

“The lady you referred to came to the counter a few minutes ago and pointed you out. She asked who you were.”

“Oh?” Kuryakin said.

“I checked the plane’s manifest and found out for her.”

“So–” Illya Kuryakin said thoughtfully.

“Her name is Theresa LeBrun,” the counter girl said. “And she is off to Hollywood, according to her ticket. That’s all I know.”

“That is enough to get me started,” Illya said. “Have you a phone I could use?”

She led him into the office. He called the American consulate and got the night charge-de-affairs to look up Theresa LeBrun’s application for an American entrance visa.

It took about five minutes and the loud speaker was directing all passengers for the trans-polar flight to Los Angeles to gather at gate number two when the attache’s voice came back on the wire.

“Mr. Kuryakin? Miss LeBrun’s application requests entry into the U.S. to work as an actress with Fred B. Mallon Productions in Hollywood.”

“Mallon!” Illya said. “Thanks!”

He turned, and after smiling thanks to the girl, he hurried toward the gate. He noticed, however that Theresa LeBrun was not going. He halted and went over to her.

“I believe this is your plane. Mademoiselle,” he said with his most engaging smile. “If I could be of assistance in–”

“I am afraid I must miss it,” she said. Her voice was distant. Her deep gray eyes looked straight into his face with an expression that seemed to Illya to be a mixture of wariness and vexation. “My companion is late.”

The voice was not the same. However, he got the impression that her deep throated tones were not natural. She was deliberately not talking in her regular voice.

The plane was loading. He decided the best thing to do was go on to the plane. Then he would call U.N.C.L.E. headquarters in New York and get them to relay a request back for the French police to investigate the background of Theresa LeBrun.

But as he started through the gate, the pretty counter girl came running after him.

“Mr. Kuryakin!” she called breathlessly. “The police called. Inspector Moreau asks that you wait a few minutes!”

“But I must catch the plane. It is urgent that I–”

“The police have ordered the plane held for you. The passengers will go ahead and load, but the pilot will wait. Inspector Moreau will be here right away.”

Inspector Moreau was even then hurrying across the lobby. The inspector drew Kuryakin back into the airline office, shutting the door in the face of the curious girl. The Frenchman unwrapped a package he was carrying. It was a smashed press camera–but with a difference. The insides were covered with wrecked wires and transistors. “It is the same as we found at the riot site in Hollywood.” Illya said. “It is the transmitter used to stimulate the subliminal hypnosis as I told you.”

Moreau nervously rewrapped the evidence.

“Mr. Kuryakin,” he said. “I fear we must revise our theories about these murders. This was found at the site of the latest riot which broke out just after you left us.

“I remembered what you said and I went looking for some sign of direction. I saw a photographer acting just as you described the man on

Sunset Strip. When I got him cornered, he ripped out the inside of his "camera'"

"This is identical with the device used in Hollywood," Illya said.

"You are sure? I wished to check with you before you got away," Moreau said. "Is there any chance of you staying a few more days and assisting us?"

Illya replied that Solo was missing. Waverly had recalled him to complete the Hollywood segment of the investigation.

"That is a great pity," Moreau said uneasily. "I fear we are involved in something that is too big for all of us."

"It may be too big for all of us if we don't get a lead soon," Kuryakin said.

"Well, let me walk to the plane with you, Mr. Kuryakin," Moreau said. "We have held you up as long as we should. I hope you will cooperate with us from the States. I'll send you a full report on the Paris riots."

"Good," Illya said. "I'll keep you informed of our own work."

They passed through the gate and started toward the waiting airplane. Suddenly the plane seemed to jump in the air. The fuselage, gleaming in the searchlights, bulged and then split with a thunderous roar of fire.

"Look out!" Illya cried.

He threw himself to the ground, dragging the inspector with him. The door of the plane went hurtling over their heads. Then the hellish blast of fire burst out of the doomed plane.

ACT V
PRISONERS OF THRUSH

The next thing Napoleon Solo remembered after falling unconscious on the hill overlooking Mallon's studio was being carried down a dark hall.

He heard a steel door creak and then slam with a metallic clang. He had difficulty focusing his eyes. All he could make out for sure was the room they passed through was very dark. He could hear gears whirling. There was a sloshing sound as of water being agitated.

He could also hear the harsh breathing of the men carrying him. In the background a woman sobbed softly. He thought it was Marsha.

They were carried into a small office. Solo saw a desk piled high with film cans. A heavy set man with a petulant face was seated at a portable film editor beside the desk.

“Don’t bother me!” he snapped over his shoulder at the men holding Solo. “I must get these prints ready for the big premiere. If they’re trespassers, throw them in the acid bath. Get rid of them. I’m not interested.”

“The girl is Marsha Mallon!” one of their captors said. “We saw her watching the studio from the park hill.”

“Good,” the film editor said. “Throw her in the acid. Get rid of her completely. Take no chances on her getting away again.”

“The man is Napoleon Solo! We found him following–”

“Solo!” The editor got up so quickly he overturned his chair.

He grabbed Napoleon’s hair and pulled Solo’s head up for a close inspection.

He gave a startled exclamation and let Napoleon’s head fall. A fearful oath slipped from his lips.

“How did those rats find out we are making the release prints down here? Get upstairs, Peters, and get THRUSH headquarters on the secret band. Tell them what happened.”

“Okay, Mr. Griffis,” Peters said. “What about the girl?”

“Leave her here,” Griffis said. “And contact Abbott to bring over some truth serum. Headquarters will want them interrogated before we –dispose of them.”

“If she spilled everything to U.N.C.L.E.–” Peters began fearfully.

“She didn’t!” Griffis snapped. “If she had, the police would be here in force. I have an idea she told U.N.C.L.E. nothing. I think Solo was following her and she didn’t know it.”

“If U.N.C.L.E. is moving in,” Peters said uneasily, “I want to be moving out!”

“Don’t lose your guts now!” Griffis snarled. “We’re running these monster prints night and day. The transmitter to bounce the signals off the Telstar communications satellite for worldwide reception will go into operation in three days. If we can get these films in the theaters by then, nothing can stop us! THRUSH will control the world”

“You’ll never do it!” Napoleon Solo heard the girl cry out suddenly. “You–”

Her cry ended in the brutal sound of a hand slapping against her mouth.

“You caused all this trouble!” Griffis snarled. “If you hadn’t run out on us, everything would have been set before U.N.C.L.E. suspected anything!”

“This was mine and you stole it!” she cried. “I’m not going to let you get away with it! You’ll pay for everything you’ve done to me and my father! I’ll kill you if it’s the last thing I do!”

“I think it will be the other way around!” Griffis said with a sneer. “You will be the one who dies, my dear! And–”

He shot a contemptuous glare down at Solo’s prone body. “And,” he went on, “I think you will have company for your journey to hell!”

“I’ll get up to the transmitter and report to THRUSH,” Peters said.

“Help me tie them up before you go, Griffis said hastily. “I can’t afford to take any chances with these U.N.C.L.E rats. There’s some cord in the bottom desk drawer.”

Peters pulled it out.

“It’s pretty light,” he said doubtfully. “It’s all we have, but it’s strong,” Griffis replied. “I’ve been using it to tie the boxes of film. Take care of Solo. I’ll bind the girl.”

Napoleon Solo stiffened. He knew that it was now or never for him. As he recalled there had been two men who brought him down. The other man was an unknown factor. He could not place him in the room. But still Solo could not afford to delay his break for freedom. He would have to face the problem of the third man when it came.

He half opened his eyes. He could not see Griffis, but Peters was bending down to pass the binding cord around Napoleon’s body.

Napoleon jerked his foot up in a lightning kick. It caught Peters in the belly. The THRUSH man staggered back, gasping. He collided with Griffis, who jumped up from trying to bind the girl.

Both men went over in a tangle. Griffis dragged a THRUSH gun from his shoulder holster. Solo could see his own U.N.C.L.E. Special on the desk beside Griffis. But it might as well have been a thousand miles away. Griffis was between him and the desk.

With a fast sweeping motion Solo kicked the overturned editor’s chair into Griffis. The THRUSH division chief fell. Before he could recover, Solo grabbed Peters, who was still doubled up in pain. He slammed the groaning man into Griffis.

At that moment the lights went out. Marsha Mallon had thrown the room switch. Griffis’ gun boomed in the total darkness. Napoleon Solo crouched low. He started for the door he had seen behind the desk. Then he suddenly crashed into a wall. It knocked him to his knees–and saved his

life. Griffis fired straight at the noise. His steel jacketed bullets ripped into the wall above Napoleon's head.

The man from U.N.C.L.E. prudently did not straighten up. He realized what had happened. He was in a corridor leading to the processing darkroom where the *Million Monsters* films were developed.

In the excitement he mistook the darkroom door for the one leading into the hall.

He could hear the grind of gears as the film ran over a multitude of rollers as it looped in and out of the developing solutions. He knew that Griffis would follow and he started fumbling his way down the length of the room. He wondered where Marsha Mallon had gone.

From what he knew of photography, he realized there would be an identical light trap in the opposite end of the room. The exposed film must be developed in total darkness for its first step. Since this was color reversal stock, it must be flashed to white light and bleached and redeveloped. But the succeeding steps could be carried out in room light.

He kept feeling his way down the length of the room. He could hear the grind of the processing machines beside him, but could see nothing.

Behind him Griffis' voice bawled: "They must have come in here. Hit the light switch there on the wall to your left, Peters!"

"It–it'll ruin the film!" Peters gasped.

"Damn the film!" Griffis snarled. "It is only one run. We can reprint. Getting those two before they ruin us is more important than anything in the world right now!"

Solo had no idea how long the room was. He only knew that he was within seconds of being exposed to Griffis gunfire.

He dropped to his hands and knees, hugging the side of the long row of processors. The entrance was on the opposite side of machines. He hoped to make the other light trap before they saw him.

The light flashed on. Napoleon Solo saw with a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach that he didn't have a chance to reach the exit.

In sheer desperation he threw his full weight against the water tank, where the film ran through a wash bath after coming from the developing tanks.

The tank teetered, hung for a moment on its outside legs, and then crashed over. Nervously Griffis cut loose with his gun. The crash of the

shots was almost lost in the din of metal and film rollers striking the concrete floor. Developing solutions sloshed against the wall.

Solo bent almost double and ran for the light trap in the back. Griffis, unable to get a clear shot, ran forward. His feet slipped on the wet floor. He sprawled flat. Peters leaped over his prone body and came after Solo.

But Napoleon had too much head start. The next room was lighted. Here the negative-developed color film came out of the first dark room and went into a powerful bleach bath. Napoleon overturned one of the tanks, splashing the highly corrosive acid on the floor between himself and Peters.

Peters realized the danger to himself. He drew back. Unopposed, Solo ran through the second dark room into the next, where dried film was spun onto reels.

He saw Marsha Mallon struggling to get a door open. He ran to her aid. Looking back over his shoulder, he saw that the overturned acid had effectively blocked pursuit in that direction.

However, he realized that he was not safely out of the trap yet. He was sure that Griffis and Peters were circling around through the hall to cut them off.

“Is it locked?” He asked breathlessly. Marsha shook her head. Her face, a mirror of combined anxiety and stubborn determination, had a wildness that enhanced her natural beauty.

He thought at that moment that he had never seen so beautiful a woman. Something about their extreme danger heightened her natural beauty.

“No!” Marsha gasped. “It is stuck!”

Napoleon Solo pushed her back. He grabbed the knob, wrenching hard. When the door failed to open, he threw one foot against the facing for support. He jerked with all his strength.

The door shivered, but held tightly. Solo heaved again. It came open with a creak of seldom used hinges.

As he started through the door, Marsha caught his arm. The unexpectedness of her movement caught Solo off balance. She moved so swiftly that he was hurled backward in a savage judo throw. He bounced off the wall and sprawled flat.

He leaped up, but was too late. Marsha slammed the door in his face. He heard the noise of a bolt sliding into place on the opposite side.

Solo was shocked by bewilderment. “But why? We’re supposed to be on the same side!”

Solo grabbed the door knob and jerked with all his strength. After the one abortive try he gave up, knowing that he could never break the bolt. He had been wrong in thinking there was another light trap at the end of the processing room. Since operations here in the drying room were in the light, none was necessary.

He leaned against the wall. There was no way out. Marsha Mallon had condemned him to a THRUSH death!

TWO

At the Paris airport Illya Kuryakin collided with Inspector Moreau as he ducked to escape being fried in the tremendous belch of flame blasting out from the exploding airliner.

The fireball mushroomed over their heads, raining fire. Illya Kuryakin threw his light top coat over his head. A ball of fire as large as his fist hit his leg. He shook it off and broke into a stumbling run. Inspector Moreau was just ahead of him–cape over his head.

Suddenly a large section of burning wing crashed out of the sky in front of them. Fire splattered wildly. The two men ducked, changed courses and ran through the gate.

“Look out, Inspector!” Illya yelled. He grabbed at Moreau’s shoulder, catching the Frenchman just as he was about to plunge into the path of an onrushing fire truck.

As soon as the truck passed the two men staggered on to the protection of the air terminal.

Moreau sank down on a chair to get his breath. Illya braced himself against the back of the adjoining divan. Three feet from him Theresa LeBrun stood against the wall. She was looking at Kuryakin rather than at the fire which gripped everyone else’s attention.

She was, he noted, holding her purse up. It struck him that she was holding it in an excellent position to extract a gun in a hurry if such should be necessary.

He was not yet ready for a showdown with the beautiful woman. So he moved to allay any suspicion that he might suspect her of implication in the plane bombing.

“You are very fortunate your companion’s delay kept you from the plane, mademoiselle,” he said, still breathing hard from his narrow escape from death.

Moreau got up. He was too agitated to notice the girl.

“I’ve got to call in a report on this,” he said to Illya. “This is no ordinary act of sabotage. That bomb was planted on the plane to destroy you, Mr. Kuryakin!”

Illya nodded. “If it had not been for your call which held me back, THRUSH would have succeeded, Monsieur Moreau.”

“Then you will stay and help us get to the bottom of this terrible monstering menace that is attacking our children?”

“I am afraid that is impossible,” Illya said regretfully. He was looking at Moreau, but he was talking directly for the benefit of the woman he suspected.

“You see, Monsieur Moreau, we have certain definite leads in Hollywood. Here there are none. We are working against time. Mr. Waverly, our operations chief, is convinced that we can make better progress getting to the root of this evil from the Hollywood angle.”

“We have absolutely nothing to go on here,” Moreau admitted.

“That is right,” Illya said, watching the girl from the corner of his eye. “There is not a person in all of France whom I can honestly say I suspect of complicity in this terrible affair.”

“But someone is!” Moreau said savagely. “These riots, this strange ‘camera.’ And then this monstrous bombing–”

He stopped and said, “But I must get about my business. We will find these criminals, Monsieur Kuryakin.”

“Working from all three ends–you here, April Dancer in London, and myself in Hollywood–I am certain we will smash this menace,” Illya replied, a confidence in his voice that he did not really feel.

Then as an extra goad to the woman, just in case his suspicions of her were true, he added: “We have some pretty good leads in Hollywood.”

“Illya was not surprised when he boarded the next plane to find that Theresa LeBrun was also a passenger. She took the seat beside him, but all attempts to start a conversation met with a very cold shoulder.

The flight went from Paris to Copenhagen and then across the North Pole for a direct route to Los Angeles. When they passed the Pole Theresa went to the pilot’s compartment for a better look at the arctic view.

She had no sooner left than the stewardess–a girl Illya knew well from previous flights he had made to Paris–stopped by his seat.

“That attractive girl who sits beside you–” she whispered.

“Yes?” Illya said.

“She tries to act as if she does not want to talk to you, but it is an act.”

“So?” Illya said. “Tell the lady she is wasting her time. If I have a spare moment in Los Angeles, I’d prefer–say, something about five-five with cute

little bangs that set off the prettiest eyes–”

“Please!” she interrupted sadly. “You are wasting your time. With the other plane lost we must make a turnaround and return to Paris. I’ll have no time to listen to such pretty words in Los Angeles.”

“What a pity!” Illya said sadly. “But there is always tomorrow.”

“If I can keep you away from that hussy!” she said somewhat spitefully. “Did you know she gave the other stewardess a thousand franc note to make sure she got the seat next to you? Does that sound like she has no interest in you?”

“I fear the lady’s interest is purely professional,” Illya replied slowly. “I’d like very much to know more about her. Sometimes a pretty girl can find out things the police can’t. Can you do a little sleuthing for me when you get back to Paris?”

“If it will help you and put her in jail, yes!”

Illya Kuryakin grinned. “It may do both,” he said. “I need to know everything I can find out about her past.”

The stewardess looked up as Theresa started back down the aisle.

“And I’ll bet she has a past!” the French girl said as she moved away before Theresa got back to her seat.

That mysterious young lady slipped easily into her seat. She did not look at Illya. He also paid no attention to her. He waited until she closed her eyes. Then he spoke softly to her. When she ignored him again, he extracted his pen communicator from his pocket. Extending the antenna, he softly called the U.N.C.L.E. headquarters code.

“Mr. Waverly,” he said in a low whisper. “Please do not reply. This is just a quick report. I have a definite lead at last.”

He pushed down the antenna and slipped the worldwide communicator back in his pocket. He turned his attention back to the movie well satisfied. He thought he detected just the slightest stiffening of his supposedly sleeping companion when he made his overly optimistic report to Waverly.

“Now,” he thought, “If she is with THRUSH, then I have baited the trap as much as I can. We’ll see if the rat bites on it.”

He was well aware that he was setting himself up as the bait in a very dangerous game.

But Illya Kuryakin was not foolhardy. He had his share of prudence. The call he made to Waverly was actually a secret code asking for a Los Angeles Police Department shadow crew to follow him when he arrived at

Los Angeles International Airport. If what he suspected was true, Theresa LeBrun would try to lead him into a THRUSH trap.

And he intended to follow her into it. Even with the police on their tail it would be decidedly dangerous for, and he had scars to prove, anything can happen when fighting THRUSH.

"But," he told himself, "I've got to make an immediate contact with THRUSH. And I haven't a lead. If setting myself up as a decoy to drag them out will do the job, then it is worth the risk."

Bored by the bang-bang spy thriller on the screen, he closed his eyes while the big jet cut through the arctic air, roared across Canada and homed in on Los Angeles for the end of its non-stop flight from Europe.

The big plane set down on the runway just at dusk. Theresa LeBrun was just ahead of Kuryakin as they went through customs. He could have used his U.N.C.L.E. status to bypass the formality, but wanted to stay as near Theresa as possible.

She ignored him when he attempted to speak to her in the customs line. She finished ahead of him.

When Kuryakin came into the main terminal a couple of minutes after him, he saw her standing by the baggage chute. The bags were sliding down the ramp and circling on a large turntable for passengers to pick out their grips.

"Mr. Kuryakin," she said.

He turned with a smile, but Theresa LeBrun gave him a cool glance.

"I am afraid there is no one to meet me," she said. "Is it possible for me to share a ride with you?"

"It is not only possible, my dear," Illya said quickly, "it is also delightful!"

"I believe you said you were going to Hollywood," the girl said.

Illya did not believe he said any such thing to her, but did not debate the point. The important thing to him right then was to keep contact with her as long as possible.

"Absolutely," he said. "I am supposed to have a car. If it stands us up too, then we'll walk. It's only twenty miles or so."

She regarded him with grave, unsmiling eyes. "You are what the Americans call a kidder, no?"

"No, but I'd like to be," Illya replied. "Anyway, I think this is my car."

He nodded toward a two-year old Ford that pulled up at the curb opposite the baggage recovery point. He recognized the plain-clothed man who got out from behind the wheel as Sergeant Hosking of the Los Angeles police homicide squad. They had worked together before.

Hosking came across the sidewalk.

"Mr. Kuryakin?" he asked as if he had never seen Illya. "I am your driver."

"Good," Illya said. "First we will drive Miss LeBrun to Hollywood."

After their luggage was stowed in the car, Illya helped Theresa into the back. He got in beside her. She stared gravely ahead, answering his attempts at conversation with the shortest possible monosyllables.

Kuryakin looked back. A car pulled out from the curb to follow them. He turned his head around noting that Hosking was watching the car also. The homicide sergeant did not appear concerned, so Illya was sure they were being followed by another police car.

He leaned back, silent after his abortive attempt to engage Theresa in conversation. It seemed impossible that she could lead him into a THRUSH trap, riding as they were in an unmarked police car and followed by another. Still he could not shake his feeling of uneasiness.

"Something is wrong about this whole setup," he told himself. But he couldn't put his finger on the exact cause of his uneasiness.

His hunch was that Theresa LeBrun was the most dangerous person he had ever tangled with. In spite of her grave quietness, Illya got the distinct impression of suppressed volcanic fire in her.

He wondered if he was making a mistake. But without other leads she seemed the most likely one. With THRUSH set to move at any moment, there wasn't any time to check other leads out. He was staking everything on this woman being what he suspected, a THRUSH link in the *Million Monsters* affair.

"If I've made a mistake," he thought, "it'll be too late to try another tack."

He was thinking of Napoleon Solo when Theresa suddenly reached over and touched his arm. The car was just rolling down the off ramp of the freeway.

"Mr. Kuryakin!" she said, an undertone of excitement coming into her voice.

“Yes?” Illya said. For some unknown reason he felt a jolt of apprehension.

Theresa did not answer, but Illya felt a sharp sting in his arm.

“What–” he began. But his tongue was suddenly thick. He tried to move, but couldn’t. Incredibly, however, his mind remained clear.

“What’s the matter?” Hosking said, turning his head back.

“Please!” Theresa said in a cold voice. “Keep your eyes on the road. Do not look back. If you do, I will kill Mr. Kuryakin!”

“Lady,” Hosking said, you can’t get away with this. There is–”

“I know!” she snapped. “There is a police car following us. You Americans are positively juvenile. Just keep driving.”

Hosking swallowed hard and pulled up to stop for a red light. Instantly Theresa’s hand flashed out. The street lamp drew a tiny reflection from the needle that protruded from the ring on her hand. She drove the needle into Hosking’s neck. Like Kuryakin, he felt a sting like a wasp.

“What the–” he began and then fell silent, slightly hunched over the wheel.

“Straighten up!” Theresa said sharply.

Hosking drew himself erect.

“Keep driving!” she snapped.

Obediently he put the car in gear. Theresa leaned back. “And I thought these men from U.N.C.L.E. were interesting adversaries. Poof! They are like children!”

She laughed softly and glanced across at Illya, sitting quietly by her side, looking straight through the windshield.

“From now on, Mr. Kuryakin,” she said, her voice savage, “I will give the orders!”

THREE

The driver reacted perfectly to Theresa's crisp orders. He drove on through Hollywood to an apartment hotel off Sunset Strip not far from Mallon Studios.

Illya Kuryakin sat beside her. He was in full possessions of his faculties. He understood everything that was going on, but for some odd reason could not react to it. The injection she had given each man made him completely subservient to her orders. Even realizing what was happening, they were powerless to break the chemical spell.

When they pull up front of the hotel, Theresa laughed softly and said to Kuryakin, "Now run back like a nice little boy and thank your cop friends for their service. Tell them you will not require their services. Say you received a call on that cute little walkie-talkie fountain pen of yours from U.N.C.L.E. headquarters. Waverly informed you that the menace you feared has been taken care of."

Obediently Kuryakin climbed from the car. He walked back to the other police car.

"Thanks, boys," he said. "Everything is fine now. Waverly just called from New York. Everything has been taken care of. He said to express his appreciation for your help."

"Okay, Illya," the driver said. "Give us a call any time we can help you."

Kuryakin walked back to Theresa, who had stepped out of the car. Hosking was pulling away in obedience to her orders. Illya stood looking at her. His mind was in turmoil. He was perfectly aware of what he had done. He knew that she was with THRUSH. He knew that he was being led into a trap that would mean his death. But he was powerless to take any action unless directed by Theresa LeBrun.

The girl had a bellhop take her bags into the hotel. She did not bother to register. A taxi pulled up beside her on the sidewalk.

"Get in," Theresa said to Illya Kuryakin.

He took his place in the back seat. She got in beside him. The driver shifted into gear and began a weaving route through several turns. It seemed

to the anguished Kuryakin that he was trying to throw off any possible pursuit.

At no time did the girl give him any orders. The driver picked his own way and finally drove them to the back entrance of the Mallon studios.

The iron gate swung open as they approached. It clanged quickly shut behind them. They drove through the back lot with the towering false fronted medieval castle set looming to their right.

Kuryakin sat stonily beside the girl. Although his body was completely at ease, his mind was in turmoil. Never in a lifetime of danger and strange adventure had he ever experienced anything like this. He had been drugged many times. Never before had he met with one that affected his body, turned it into a slave-zombie, but left his mind to function apparently unaffected.

It was as if the strange chemical she injected into his body from her ring had disconnected his mind from the body. The body then passed to her control.

As the car swung out of the castle set road and turned into what looked like a reconstruction of lower east side in New York, Theresa LeBrun looked over at Illya and laughed softly.

“Are you wondering what has happened to you?” she asked. “You do know what is going on. You can hear every word I say, can’t you?”

“Yes,” Illya said.

It was not his mind that answered. His tongue was obeying impulses from Theresa’s mind instead of his own.

“Let me tell you about it,” she said. “That is part of the fun. And it is fun, you know, to defeat a worthy adversary. Although, I must say that you turned out to be disappointingly easy.”

She sighed and went on, “After you slipped out of my death traps twice, I thought I had at last met a man worth fighting. But you were a disappointment, like all the others.”

She laughed softly. Her face, barely visible in the darkness, glowed. “Yes, Kuryakin,” she said, “I’ll tell you, for you have but a short time to live. I was in Paris running tests on this new slave drug which I helped develop for THRUSH. I received word that you were coming on a mission that would be dangerous to THRUSH. I was told to make contact with a paid assassin named LeBlanc and arrange for your immediate liquidation. Instead I decided to do it myself.

“And I would have done it too. After you escaped from the plane bombing, I had another bomb already planted in the office. I could have blown you and Inspector Moreau to hell, but I received a last minute message to deliver you here. They needed to interrogate you to see how close U.N.C.L.E. was on their trail. After the questioning, you will be killed. I have been promised the pleasure!”

The car stopped in front of a building marked *Film Lab.* Theresa identified herself to the guard and they went inside. It was pitch black inside. Kuryakin wondered if she had the eyes of a cat as well as the soul of a tiger.

They came out in an office. Illya’s heart turned over with a jolt when he saw Napoleon Solo across the room. The man from U.N.C.L.E. was bound to a straight chair. Solo looked deathly tired and sick. Ugly bruises stood out vividly against the paleness of his skin.

A stocky man got up from a film editor beside a desk littered with film cans and a camera that looked exactly like the control transmitter found on Hollywood strip and again in Paris after the riot.

“I’m Griffis,” he said to Theresa. “Your identification?”

“Million monsters, seven-oh-three,” the girl said, giving her secret pass code that identified her as a member of the project.

“Who is this with you?” Griffis asked suspiciously, staring hard at Illya Kuryakin.

“This is Kuryakin,” Theresa said with a peculiar smile twisting her vampirish lips.

Griffis reared back like a frightened horse. He jerked open the desk drawer to grab his THRUSH gun.

Theresa LeBrun laughed, a definite contempt in her voice.

“Don’t panic,” she said. “Kuryakin is unable to make a single move unless I order it.”

“Only a fool toys with these men from U.N.C.L.E.,” Griffis retorted. “They have more tricks than the devil himself.”

“Don’t worry,” Theresa retorted. “He is under the influence of THRUSH’s latest development, a slave drug. His mind is disconnected from his body. His muscles react only to a precise tone code.”

She turned to Illya.

“Sit down,” she said.

Like a well trained dog, he reacted to her command. Griffis still looked doubtful.

“Stand behind him, Peters,” he said. “I don’t trust these U.N.C.L.E. rats under any conditions.”

“Let me show you something,” Theresa said.

She took a tiny gun out from her handbag. She held it out to Illya.

“Don’t do that!” Griffis screamed.

Theresa laughed and put the gun back in her purse.

“You see,” she said, “He could have grabbed the gun and killed us all if he had been in control of himself. That proves he is not shamming. He is completely in my control!”

“How long will he stay under the drug’s influence?” Griffis asked.

“Long enough for you to interrogate him,” Theresa said. “But you will have to relay your questions to me. I must repeat them with just the right tone unless you can ape the tone yourself.”

“That isn’t necessary,” Griffis said. “You do it. I want to question him about the extent of U.N.C.L.E.‘s knowledge of this project.”

“Why was it necessary to bring him all the way back here from Paris for that?” Theresa wanted to know. “I could have gotten all that from him there. But for no good reason I received a THRUSH code message to bring him back.”

Griffis said, “It was my order. We had just captured Napoleon Solo, his companion. I thought best to interrogate the two together. That way I can compare stories, fill in the gaps which the other does not know, and get the full story. He was returning anyway, so there was no additional risk. In fact, this seemed the safest way to me.”

Theresa shrugged. It was obvious both to Solo and Illya that she was not impressed by Griffis. The THRUSH project chief in this seemed somewhat wary of the French girl.

Solo’s heart started to beat faster. Although the situation seemed desperate, he was the type that never gave up hope. Now the obvious animosity between the two key figures in the THRUSH scheme gave him an idea of trying to play one against the other. He had no idea how it could be done, but it was a thin thread of hope.

Also, there was Kuryakin himself. Theresa’s tale of a “slave-drug” struck Solo as fantastic. He had never seen or heard of the girl before, but she was, he thought, obviously a THRUSH agent. He was certain that if

THRUSH had developed such a revolutionary drug, U.N.C.L.E. spies in the organization would have reported it promptly to Waverly.

He stared at his companion, wondering if Kuryakin was feigning or actually under this strange woman's control. Then he saw her turn her back to Illya.

"How much does U.N.C.L.E. know about this *Million Monsters* affair?"

A sickening jolt ran through Napoleon Solo's body and exploded in his brain when he heard his companion tell the absolute truth, which was that they knew only what they had observed during the riots.

Kuryakin's answers made it plain to Solo that Illya was truly in the grip of some terrible compulsive force. He was giving answers that not only revealed how little they knew about the subliminal effect, but also things that were damaging to the entire U.N.C.L.E. organization.

There was no question in his mind that Illya had sold out. He knew his companion too well to even suspect such a crime. That meant then that the girl's fantastic claim of a "slave drug" was true!

Sweat popped out on the bound man's face. His stomach heaved and for a moment he was so disturbed that he felt physically ill.

"Take it easy," he told himself. "There is a way out. There *has* to be!"

He shivered as his agile mind sought a solution. Illya's ready answers proved that no one could fight the new drug's effect. He knew as soon as they drained Kuryakin's mind dry he would be inoculated himself. Then what Illya hadn't spilled of U.N.C.L.E.'s secrets, he would.

"If THRUSH can obtain all we know about U.N.C.L.E. between us, they can destroy Waverly and all of U.N.C.L.E.!" he thought, shivering as the horror of their situation grew on him. For the first time in his long battles with THRUSH, he was close to despair.

ACT VI

THE MONSTER'S REVENGE

Solo closed his eyes, but his mind was alert. A hundred mad schemes tumbled through his mind as he sought some way to turn the tables on their enemies.

Suddenly through his despair the glimmer of an idea broke through. He tensed, straining body and mind as his ears caught every changing inflection of Theresa LeBrun's voice as she questioned Illya Kuryakin.

There was definitely a rhythmic pattern to her tonal inflections. It was subtle, but different from the tone in which she addressed Griffis when she paused in her questioning of Kuryakin.

He recalled that she had told Griffis that victims of the slave drug responded to certain voice tones.

The almost computer-like precision of his mind dissected each tone she used in addressing her prisoner. Her questions came rapidly on the heels of each damaging answer Illya Kuryakin reluctantly gave her about the inner workings of U.N.C.L.E.

Solo kept sorting the tones, cataloging them in his mind, and mentally repeating them as he sought the proper inflection and tone color.

He knew that he could not do it all mentally. He needed practice aloud, but dared not risk it. Everything depended on surprise. He could only sag against the rope that bound him to the metal chair–and sweat and hope.

It was not warm in the room. California nights are not hot. But Solo could see a thin film of sweat on Illya's forehead. It showed how much Kuryakin was trying to fight against giving his betraying answers about U.N.C.L.E. It also showed the tremendous power of the strange drug.

As the questioning went on, Napoleon Solo was sure that he now understood the tonal control the girl was using, but still he hesitated. He knew this would be his one and only chance. If it failed, then he and Illya would die, and U.N.C.L.E. would die with them. With Waverly's secrets exposed, it would be relatively simple for THRUSH to hamstring the great organization.

Sweat dripped off Solo's body. Never in his life had he been under greater strain. And he knew that Kuryakin was in even worse torment. Illya's mind knew that he was giving away secrets about the organization that meant so much to him. But he was powerless under the terrible influence of the super-powerful drug.

The questioning was interrupted by the arrival of a man Solo had never seen before.

"The transmitter is complete," he told Griffis. "The Telstar communications satellite will be in position within an hour. THRUSH headquarters wants to know if you are ready to start transmitting."

"Yes!" Griffis said. "Tell them I am ready. We will start riots in every major city in the western hemisphere. The instructional signals to the teenagers we have already mesmerized will contain strong subliminal

suggestions to those we have not yet reached. Their minds will be impregnated and then they will react to the instructions. By tomorrow evening every person in this half of the world who is under twenty-five will be our slave!”

When the THRUSH technician left to make his report back to his headquarters, Theresa said to Griffis, “If things are so near the end, there is little point in continuing the interrogation. U.N.C.L.E. will be destroyed anyway in the debacle.”

“Forget Kuryakin,” he said. “Things are moving faster than I suspected. However, if you have any more of that drug, I would like to ask Solo a very important question.”

“What is that?” Theresa asked. “What does it matter now? Destroy both of them. These men are cunning and dangerous. There is no use taking any further chances with them.”

“They will be disposed of,” Griffis said. “We have some extremely corrosive acid we use as a bleach for our film. I am sure it will bleach all the danger from our prisoners! I promise you that after two hours in that vat we can flush both Kuryakin and Solo down a drain!”

“Good!” Theresa said with relish. “I particularly love the thought of dissolving Kuryakin. Twice I had him in a trap and he escaped me. Now he will pay for it!”

“What I want to question Solo about,” Griffis said, “is Marsha Mallon. We had her but she escaped when Solo jumped her. She is still at large somewhere here in the studio.”

“Tear the place down,” Theresa snapped. “Find her! She is extremely dangerous to have at large.”

“Don’t I know it!” Griffis said grimly. “She is the one who invented the subliminal process. She understands it fully. She is trying now to destroy it before we can conquer the world. As long as she is loose, there is a chance she can stop us some way. I want to know if Solo has any idea where she is hiding.”

“It seems to me you could flush her out,” Theresa said.

“This was her father’s studio. The back lot was her playground when she was a child. She knows every cranny,” Griffis said savagely.

“Is she cooperating with U.N.C.L.E. now?” Theresa asked.

“No,” the THRUSH man replied. “She is afraid she and her father will be blamed, since she invented the subliminal effect. She hopes to destroy us

before anyone learns the secret."

"A lone wolf, huh?" Theresa remarked. "She hasn't got a chance!"

"I'm not so sure," Griffis replied glumly. "Remember, she is an electronics genius. She invented this process. If anyone can counteract it, she is the one. We are not safe as long as that woman is loose."

"But if she is afraid of U.N.C.L.E., how would Solo know where she is?"

"They escaped together. He might have seen where she went. I don't know. It is a chance. At this stage we can't afford to let any possible chance slip past us. I fear that woman more than I fear U.N.C.L.E."

"Very well," Theresa said. "I have another shot of the stuff in my ring. I'll give it to him!"

She turned away from Kuryakin. Napoleon Solo braced himself. Bound as he was to the chair, there was nothing he could do himself to keep the woman from inoculating him with the slave drug.

His only chance then was to ape Theresa's tones and shout for Illya to attack. He knew Theresa would instantly countermand his toned order to Kuryakin, but he hoped desperately that his companion could move fast enough to knock Theresa out before she could react.

He shot a quick glance at Griffis, measuring the distance between them. It was vital that the THRUSH field director be delayed long enough for Illya to knock out the woman and then meet Griffis on more even terms.

It seemed to Solo that if he threw himself forward against his bonds at the right moment, he and the chair he was tied to would fall directly in Griffis path as he rushed to aid Theresa.

It was a mad, desperate plan, Solo knew. It had scant chance of success, but it was all he could do and he was determined not to give up without a final fight.

But as Theresa stepped toward him, there was a loud banging on the door, she whirled. Griffis picked up the gun he had previously laid on the desk.

"This is Peters!" the voice of the man who was with them before called through the door. "We have her! We've caught Marsha Mallon!"

"Wonderful!" Griffis cried. His florid face glowed with almost drunken delight. He stepped across the room and opened the door. Peters and a man Solo did not recognize came in, dragging Marsha with them.

They pushed the girl back in the chair. She was breathing hard. Her clothes were torn and her face bruised. She had obviously put up a fight.

“The last possible roadblock has been cleared!” Griffis cried. “Since you only have one shot of the slave drug left, don’t waste it on Solo. I want to know if the girl has a way to interfere with our directional transmissions to the subliminal slaves.”

Napoleon Solo braced himself, tensing his aching muscles for his desperate move. The odds had doubled against them, but he dared not delay any longer.

Across from him Griffis was telling Peters: “As soon as Theresa gets all she can out of Marsha, take all three of them to the acid tanks. I want their threat removed once and for all.”

“We’ll be going on the air in less than half an hour with the transmission to the kids’ brains,” Peters said.

“But we will still be vulnerable. If they should succeed in cutting off the transmitter, all the teenage monsters will lapse back into normality. Stop arguing! I want them dissolved in the acid!”

“I’m not arguing!” Peters said in an aggrieved tone. “I just–”

“Just shut up! I’ll do the thinking!” Griffis snapped. “Theresa! Get on with it!”

“Don’t use that tone of voice with me!” Theresa Snarled. “I’m not one of your THRUSH slaves!”

Solo’s heart leaped. He leaned forward as much as he could. Then under cover of the hot quarrel between Theresa LeBrun and Griffis, he gave a low whistle that aped the tone range she used in ordering Kuryakin about. It was not a spoken command, but Solo noticed a slight jerk of his companion’s body at the low, quick sound.

Solo’s heart leaped. This slight jerk of Kuryakin’s body was not proof positive that Solo could control him as Theresa had, but it gave him hope at a desperate moment when he was tottering on the brink of total loss.

“Kuryakin!” he suddenly yelled. “Attack! Attack! Knock out the woman first! She is the dangerous one!”

He didn’t wait to see the effect of his toned order. He hurled his body forward. His head drove into Griffis side. He and the chair went down on top of the falling man.

“Grab his gun!” Napoleon Solo shouted to Marsha. “Get his gun or we’re lost!”

Griffis was twisting violently. He jerked the gun up, trying to get the barrel aimed at Solo. Handicapped as he was by the chair to which he was bound, Napoleon had nothing to fight with but his head. He drove that hard into Griffis' chin.

The blow cracked as bone smashed into bone. The THRUSH man's head snapped back. The gun in his hand exploded, but Griffis' aim was spoiled by Solo's desperate lunge into him.

Napoleon paid heavily for his miraculously close escape from death. The crash of his skull against Griffis' chin hurt him as badly as it did his THUSH adversary. His senses reeled momentarily. For an awful moment he thought he was losing consciousness.

He caught a dim view of Griffis swinging around. He could see the gun in the man's hand!

TWO

When Napoleon made his first tentative whistle in Theresa's commanding tone, Illya Kuryakin realized what his friend was trying to do. Illya's mind had always been clear. It was only the the drug had disconnected his mind from his body–as if a mental clutch had been thrown out.

The whistle from Solo caused a tingling sensation all over his body–proving that it had some effect. Like Napoleon, Illya did not know if this was proof that Solo had found the secret of command for victims of the slave drug.

He hoped desperately that Napoleon would follow up the trial whistle with a full command. His body was relaxed. He had no control, but he tensed mentally. He was on edge and ready to leap into action if Napoleon could give the right tone command to activate his body.

Then Peters brought in his prisoner. Illya saw the sick despair on Solo's face at the sight of Marsha Mallon in THRUSH's hands. He felt the same way himself although his mentally imprisoned body did not reveal it.

Then when Theresa LeBrun turned to jab her slave drug needle into Marsha Mallon, Illya heard Napoleon's frantic command.

The tone was perfect. He hurled himself straight at the LeBrun woman. He understood as well as Solo did that he had to take her out of the fight or everything was lost.

Theresa jerked around when Solo shouted the command to Illya. She recognized instantly that he was copying her commanding tone.

"Kuryakin–" she began.

The rest of her words were lost in the smash of Illya's fist on her open mouth. His natural reluctance to strike a woman was forgotten in the desperation of the moment. The freedom of half the world and the lives of the other half depended on the outcome of this battle.

Theresa was knocked back. She struck against Marsha just as the Mallon girl grabbed for the gun Griffis was trying to line up Solo's head. Theresa tried to scream a command to Kuryakin, but her bruised lips could not form the precise tones she needed.

Illya meanwhile ducked a blow from Peters. He grabbed the THRUSH man in a quick Judo throw and hurled him into the other man rushing at him. He grabbed them by the hair and slammed their heads together with a savage crash.

He whirled to see Griffis jerk his gun up to kill Napoleon Solo. Frantic, Illya leaped to head off the shot.

Theresa LeBrun, crying and dripping blood from her injured mouth, threw herself in Illya's path. The two collided and fell.

Solo tried to throw his bound body forward to hit Griffis' legs. The THRUSH field chief leaned back out of the way. His face was fiendish as he leveled the gun at Solo's face.

Solo had done all he could. Illya was trying to scramble up, but Solo knew he could not outrace Griffis bullet now.

Griffis fired! The sound of the explosion was thunderous in the small room. Solo flinched involuntarily as the gun went off. His body jerked with surprise as the bullet missed him by a wide margin and slammed into the wall.

Then he saw the reason. Marsha Mallon struck Griffis down. She had grabbed the camera-transmitter from the desk and hit Griffis in the head with it.

The THRUSH field director toppled forward on his face.

"Good girl!" Solo gasped. "Get me untied. I–"

She dropped the broken transmitter and fled into the darkroom.

"Illya!" Solo cried. "Get her! She's the absolute key to everything now!"

Kuryakin only stood there. His slave drugged body had done all his previous orders called for. In his excitement Napoleon had yelled at him in his normal tone of voice.

He tried again and his thickened tongue betrayed him. Desperation mounting to a fever, he tried still another time.

"Illya! Illya! Untie me!"

Kuryakin's body jerked. He leaped over the unconscious body of Theresa LeBrun and started struggling with the knot of the rope that bound Solo to the chair.

As soon as it was loosened, Solo gasped, "We've got to get Marsha. Knocking out Griffis won't help us at all. The transmitter crew already has

its programmed orders. Unless we can destroy it immediately, the monster orders will go out on schedule!”

He burst this out in his normal voice, knowing Illya’s brain would receive it, even though his friend’s mind could not transmit orders to his own body.

Then Solo changed to the difficult job of copying Theresa’s control tones.

“Stay here,” he said. “Keep Theresa unconscious no matter what you have to do. She can still control you until that infernal drug wears off. I’m going after Marsha. I’ve got to convince her to cooperate with us–or THRUSH is going to win!”

He cut through the first darkroom, following the girl’s tracks. Then he went through the light-trap maze into the other room, a bullet smashed into the door facing near his head.

“Don’t come any closer!” Marsha’s voice screamed at him. “I’ll kill you!”

Solo leaped back. He realized then what had happened. In his haste and anxiety he had forgotten that he had overturned the acid tanks in the bleaching room. Marsha was trapped.

“Marsha!” he called. “Miss Mallon! This is Napoleon Solo. I’m from U.N.C.L.E. We are both fighting the same battle. We must have your help. If you don’t work with us, we’re going to fail. Can you understand me?”

“Get back!” the frightened girl cried. “If you don’t get back, I’ll kill you!”

“But don’t you understand? We’re from U.N.C.L.E. We’re trying to stop this awful thing the same as you are!”

“You’re trying to trap me!” she cried. “I don’t believe you’re from U.N.C.L.E.”

Napoleon cursed in a burst of futile despair. What could he do to convince her?

“Miss Mallon!” he said, trying again. “You saw us prisoners of the THRUSH group. We–”

“THRUSH has many enemies!” she cried. “How do I know you aren’t trying to steal the secret from them for your own evil uses?”

“What must I do to convince you?” Napoleon cried, exasperated.

“Just go away and leave me alone! I know what they are doing better than anyone. I can beat them myself if you’ll just let me alone!”

“Listen! Is there a phone anywhere we can get to? You can call U.N.C.L.E. headquarters yourself. I can give you information that will positively permit them to identify me over the phone. Will you do that?”

“Even if you are from U.N.C.L.E., what good would it do?” she replied bitterly. “My father tried to contact U.N.C.L.E. and what did it get him? THRUSH killed him and almost got me. I don’t want any help from U.N.C.L.E. or anybody. I’ll go it alone.”

“You haven’t a chance,” Solo argued. “The transmitter is all set to go. The crew is ready to flash its destroying message just as soon as the Telstar communications satellite starts to circle this part of the globe. We have less than thirty minutes.”

“I don’t care!” she cried in a choked voice. “I can’t trust you! I am certain you are trying to trick me!”

Napoleon Solo groaned in frustrated rage. Never before had he so missed his marvelous collection of U.N.C.L.E. protective devices. He would have given his soul just for the chewing gum that made up into a high explosive.

This alone would have provided the “equalizer” that would have made him and Illya Kuryakin a match for the entire THRUSH group.

There were THRUSH men all over the studio. He could not hope to find a phone without being captured first. He had already seen how strongly the perimeter of the studio was patrolled by THRUSH guards. It was equally impossible to try and sneak out of the place.

Yet, something had to be done fast or THRUSH would launch its worldwide monsterizing transmissions. All they were waiting for was the communications satellite to come into position–and that was only minutes away.

A dozen mad schemes for stopping THRUSH flashed through Solo’s mind. He considered everything from setting the studio on fire to trying to get the Air Force to bomb it out of existence. But each scheme required communications with the outside to put it into operation. And that seemed impossible in itself.

There was only one possible way he could see to smash the THRUSH control team and wipe out the threat in the thin margin of time left to them. And that directly involved Marsha Mallon’s cooperation. Without her there was no hope. The world was doomed to THRUSH slavery–that half of it that would survive the debacle.

He tried to explain to her what he had in mind. She wouldn't listen. She kept threatening to shoot if he did not back away so she could get out of her trap.

"Okay," Solo said in a beaten tone. "Do what you will."

"Move around to the side," Marsha ordered. "I'm going past you. If you try to stop me, I'll kill you!"

"Go on," he said in a dull, dispirited voice. He moved cautiously along the wall on the opposite side of the still processing machines.

Marsha started to inch forward on the other side. Solo stood where she could watch him. His head and shoulders were visible above the machines. She could not see the rest of him.

Solo took a deep, unsteady breath.

"It's now or never!" he told himself. "If this doesn't work–"

He broke off the thought, unable to consider the awful consequences.

THREE

As Marsha moved toward the light trap to make her way back into the room where Kuryakin waited, Solo brought his knees up quickly. She could not see his swift action, for his body was blocked from her sight by the processing machine.

He jerked off his shoe. As she came around the other end of the machine, inching toward the light-trap, he hurled the shoe at her.

She saw it coming too late. She tried to duck. The shoe hit her shoulder. She was knocked back against the wall.

The instant he threw the shoe, Solo vaulted up on the processing machine. He got his feet on the edge of the big vat-like box and scrambled over the Plexiglas top that enclosed the multitude of reels over which the film moved up and down through the developing solutions. From here he leaped straight for the girl.

When Marsha leaped back in an attempt to dodge the thrown shoe, she went off balance. It was this more than the blow that knocked her off her feet. She hit the wall and slipped to the floor.

Instantly she jerked her body around as Napoleon leaped off the processing machine. She fired at him from the floor. There wasn't time to aim. The bullet smashed into the ceiling as he landed on top of her.

The weight of his body hit her with such force that the breath was knocked out of the confused girl. She collapsed, gasping.

Solo leaped to his feet. Blood oozed from a gash where his head struck the wall. He was not even conscious of the blow.

He pulled the gun from her slack fingers and shoved it in his pocket. Then, lifting her in his arms, he went back to the office.

He dumped her in a chair by the desk. The dead body of Griffis was beside her. Across the small room lay the unconscious figures of two Thrushmen and Theresa LeBrun. Illya Kuryakin was gone.

"Illya!" Solo called. Then realizing he had spoken in his normal tones, repeated his call, aping the inflections of Theresa LeBrun.

Kuryakin stuck his head in from the hall.

"You can forget that, Napoleon," he said quickly. "I'm coming out from under the drug's influence."

“I’ve got the girl, now–” Napoleon began.

“THRUSH has an exterminator crew after us, Napoleon!” Illya broke in. “I heard them coming and got the fire doors closed in the hall. It won’t stop them for long. I heard one of them shout for the other to go get a wrecking bar.”

“Can you stop them until I can talk some sense into the addled head of this silly woman?” Solo asked.

“I got my bare hands,” Illya said. “I’ll do what I can.”

“We have her gun. It’s the one she took from Griffis. It can’t have more than a couple of shots left in it. That’s no help either.”

He was deathly tired. His body had taken constant punishment since the beginning of this miserable affair. His face was drawn and haggard. His eyes were bloodshot. Every line of his sagging body betrayed his near exhaustion. Illya Kuryakin was in no better shape.

“What are we going to do?” Illya asked.

“Fight!” Solo snapped. “That’s all that’s left for us to do.”

“Then lead on, MacDuff!” Illya said. “If we get out of this mess alive, I’ll never, *never* doubt us again. We can do anything!”

“We’re not going to get out alive unless I can knock some sense into this idiot’s head,” he said savagely, glaring at Marsha Mallon.

The girl glared back, equally ferocious and equally stubborn. “Listen to me,” Napoleon Solo said, his voice shaking with earnestness. “There is only one way to smash THRUSH’s transmitters. We have to have an army to do it. We have an army–an army of teenage monsters! There’s one of the portable transmitters on the desk at your elbow. It’s broken. Even if it wasn’t, I don’t know how to use it. If you can repair the thing and send out the impulses to activate that Sunset Strip gang, we’re in! They can be made to storm this place. If they do half as much damage as they did on Sunset Boulevard, they’ll put the THRUSH transmitter out of commission.”

“I can’t trust you, “Marsha mumbled. Her pretty face was flushed and set in stubborn lines.

“Then damn it, don’t trust us!” Solo cried.

He jerked the gun from his coat pocket and shoved it across the desk to her.

“There’s at least two shots left in that thing,” he snapped. We’ll stand on the opposite side of the room from you. Get that damn transmitter working and zombie those kids into tearing this place down! Then if you think we’re

trying to put anything over on you, you can pull the trigger of that gun with it pointed straight at my heart! What else must I do to convince you that the only stake Illya and I have in this mess is to try and save a lot of lives– including, in case it never occurred to you, yours and ours as well.

A wave of uncertainty spread across Marsha's face. She picked up the gun. A quick glance showed her it was loaded. She looked at Napoleon Solo with a tired, almost vacant stare.

Then she said slowly, "I–I don't know–"

She got up and backed across the room, putting as much space between herself and the men from U.N.C.L.E. as she could.

From down the hall came the sound of heavy battering. "They are attacking the door!" Illya said. "There's no way out for us. This place has no windows and no back door. You had better do something quickly, Miss Mallon, or we're all dead!"

"Pick up the transmitter," she said in a defeated voice.

Solo grabbed it up from the desk. "Open the back," Marsha Mallon said.

Solo opened the back of the camera-appearing device. He saw a jungle of wires, transistors and coils. At her order he set a tiny switch. "Do any of the five crystals in the center of the circuit glow?" she asked.

"Three," he replied.

"Then all that happened when Griffis broke the transmitter was that the wires to the capacitor snapped. Cut off the circuit. That thing works like a car's coil to store up energy for a step up in voltage. It's off? Then push the red wires back in place."

Solo found the break and repaired it quickly.

"They're breaking the door in, Napoleon!" Illya yelled from the hall.

"Hold them back!" Solo snapped. "We've got to have a little more time."

"Hold them back with what?" Illya snapped. "They're breaking the fire door in. They'll be on us in a couple of minutes."

"Build a fire in the hall!" Solo yelled back. "That should stop them long enough for us to get this thing working."

"And cook us with them! Kuryakin retorted. "Well, that's better than letting THRUSH win!"

He grabbed a full waste paper basket for tinder and rushed out.

"It's ready, all five lights are burning now," Solo said to the girl.

“Hold the transmitter so the lens points in the direction of Sunset,” she said. “Speak into what looks like a camera viewfinder, tell them to destroy the Mallon Studios. I don’t know where the transmitter is, but I suspect it must be on the top of the studio administration building. Send them there first.”

“Any special tone?” Solo asked.

“The transmitter is automatic,” she replied. “Open with the call letters Seven-seven-Four. That activates the subliminally induced hypnosis in their minds. Then give your orders.”

“Seven-seven-Four!” Solo cried into the disguised microphone. “Seven-seven-Four. Rush to the Mallon Studios. Destroy the Administration building! Then rush the processing laboratory. More of your enemies are there! Seven-seven-Four–”

He was interrupted by Illya rushing in, dripping wet. “The fire in the hall only activated the automatic fire extinguisher sprays. It’s out. They’re coming Napoleon!”

“Come on!” Solo cried. “Back into the processing room. There’s still a vat of acid in the bleach room. There are some buckets in the corner. We’ll throw acid on them when they come in the door!”

“Look out!” Illya shouted. “Here they come!”

He grabbed the chair that lately had been bound to Solo and hurled it through the door as the first running Thrushman bore down upon them with a gun in his hand.

A gun exploded behind him. He whirled to see Marsha Mallon emptying her gun at the oncoming men from THRUSH. Two shots and she was through. The three retreated back into the processing room. Their enemies halted. Two of the THRUSH men were dead. A third had a bad cut where the chair had hit him.

“Don’t stand there like a pack of fools!” In the other room the three fugitives heard a man’s angry voice cry out. “I’m in charge here now that Griffis is dead. Get in there and drag them out. Don’t worry about taking prisoners. We’re through with them now. Slaughter them!”

“How long will it take the zombie-monsters to get here?” Illya asked Napoleon.

“It shouldn’t take more than five minutes,” Solo replied, “if they got the message.”

“Can we hold out?” the girl asked fearfully.

“Yes,” Illya said quickly. “I don’t know how. But we’ll do it. We *have* to!”

“There’s one!” Marsha cried as a THRUSH man appeared in the light trap opening.

Solo hit the light switch, plunging the room into total darkness. At the same time he kicked the processing machine, making a sound almost like a bullet exploding. They heard a scramble of feet as their pursuer withdrew.

“They got guns!” the trapped trio heard him squall. “It’s pitch black in there. We have no chance to rush them.”

“Then set some rags afire in a trash can,” their boss ordered. “Throw that in. We’ll smoke them out!’

“Mr. Clary! Mr. Clary!” It was a voice from the far end of the hall.

“More reinforcements!” Illya said. “That’s no worry to us. When the odds are already impossible what does it matter whether you face fifty or a hundred?”

“Quiet, Illya!” Napoleon said. “Let’s hear what he says. He sounds hysterical to me. *Maybe–*”

“Mr. Clary!” the newcomer squalled again, his voice coming nearer. “The monster-kids! Something has gone wrong! They’re attacking the studio. They broke through the gate and are ripping everything to pieces.”

“What! Then that woman has one of the transmitters working! Get back to the satellite transmitter and tell them to start the signal early. We’ll drown out her transmission and take over! We’re in one hell of a spot! Damn those U.N.C.L.E. rats!”

“Yes, sir, Mr. Clary. I–Help! The monster kids are coming down the hall. They’re closing in on us!”

“Stop them!” Shoot them! Do something, you fools, or we’ll be overrun!” Clary screamed.

Shots echoed through the narrow halls. Screams cut above the din. The tramp of running feet beat like a thousand drums. The noise sounded like they were inside the office. The three fugitives could hear nothing but the crash of furniture and the shouts and screams.

“Leave the lights off,” Solo said. “Maybe they won’t notice we are in here.”

Just then the entire wall separating the office from the processing room collapsed under the crush of the mob screaming in.

“Turn them! Turn them!” Marsha cried. “Use the transmitter.”

“Seven, seven, four!” Solo cried into the mouthpiece. “Seven, seven, four! To the administration building! Tear down the transmitter!”

The mob obediently turned and charged out of the building. The trio came out of the darkroom behind them. Clary and those with them were dead–beaten and trampled to a bloody pulp by the monsters they made themselves.

Once in the open, Solo and Kuryakin were shocked at the terrible damage. The place looked like a town after an artillery bombardment. Across the block the administration building was aflame.

“Is that–” Solo asked.

“Yes,” she said, “the transmitter was there. That wooden tower on top disguises the antenna. It is all over. THRUSH has lost. Thank you for forcing me to help you. I–”

She turned and fled into the darkness. Illya started after her, but Napoleon Solo stopped him. “Remember,” he told Kuryakin, “in our report there is to be nothing that implies she was at fault in letting THRUSH get this secret. That was one of the things she feared. She wanted to save her reputation and that of her father.”

“As far as I’m concerned,” Illya said, “if she did anything wrong, she more than atoned for it. We wouldn’t be here but for her.”

“I think we can call off these Frankenstein teenagers now,” Solo said.

He gave the order into the speaker. Instantly all the wild commotion stopped just as screaming police cars wheeled up the street fronting the studio.

A burly nineteen-year-old who looked like center timber for a Notre Dame football squad looked at Solo in amazed confusion.

“I just had a coke,” he mumbled, “and this happened! What do they put in those things now?”

Illya smiled wearily.

“Making them stronger, I guess,” he said. “And watch out for those California milk shakes too. Can’t tell how they’ll make you act either!”

“Come on,” Solo said. “We must report to Waverly. THRUSH has lost again.”

“But just a setback,” Illya said. “That crazy group never stops trying.”

“Stop complaining,” Napoleon said. “It provides a living for us.”

“A living that comes pretty close at times to dying!” Illya Kuryakin retorted.

“You can say that again!” Napoleon Solo replied.
He was suddenly very tired.